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"LISTERINE HAS LANDED

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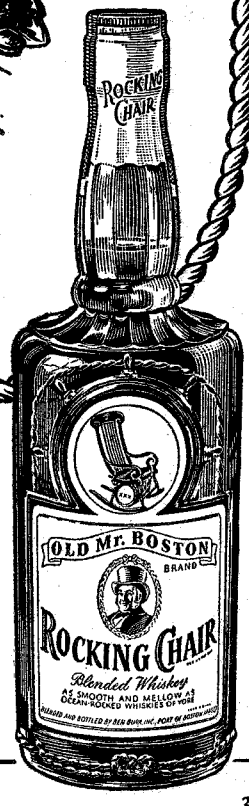

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 311 | CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 13, 1941 | Number 6

Looking Ahead!

LONESOME HILL

Every town has its haunted house; but Four Corners, as you might have expected, has a haunted house de luxe—one complete with ghost and legend *plus* a living corpse that infests its tatterdemalion interior, searching for ships in bottles and a fortune that went up into thin air. In such a museum of crumbled crime, the amateur ghost-breaker must come equipped with wit and skill as well as —don't laugh—a pair of seaworthy water wings. A fascinating novelet for the connoisseur of the out-of-the-ordinary, by

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COREY BECKWITH

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On Sale November 26th

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This magazine is on sale every other Wednesday

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Beyond this city lie the jungles, savage and primitive; but life here in Georgetown is very civilized. Yes, so civilized that Peril must be suave to walk these tropic streets by night; that International Intrigue must spin its web most cunningly; and Murder must be skillful and sleek.... Beginning an absorbing mystery novel

CHAPTER I

STRANGE WELCOME

WHEN Johnny Hammond pushed back from the dinner table that Thursday night, Valery Ward and Kerry Snyder exchanged worried glances. Even Alice, the maid, wore a look of concern, for throughout the meal Hammond's conversation had been limited to monosyllables and grunts, most of them curt and irascible. Now, moving into the drawing room, he turned to Snyder.

"Want to see you," he said bluntly.

"Certainly."

Hammond, a lean, weathered man with tired eyes and a yellowish, unhealthy pallor to his skin, eyed the other steadily.

"I've found out some things today I've been wondering about for a long time," he said. "Want to talk to you." He glanced at the girl, who watched him anxiously. "You will excuse us, Val?"

He turned then, and crossed the hall to the study. Snyder looked at the girl, spoke softly.

"What's eating the old boy? What happened today while I was in Parika? He didn't get some bad news from Lane Morgan, did he?"

"Lane Morgan?" Valery Ward gave the word a bitter, scornful cadence that seemed out of character with her young face and fresh tawny beauty. "He'll never hear from him. If Lane Morgan intended to answer Johnny's letter he'd have done so a month ago. And yet"—she broke off, her gray eyes troubled and touched with sadness— "every time a boat comes in, or a plane, he asks if there is a letter."

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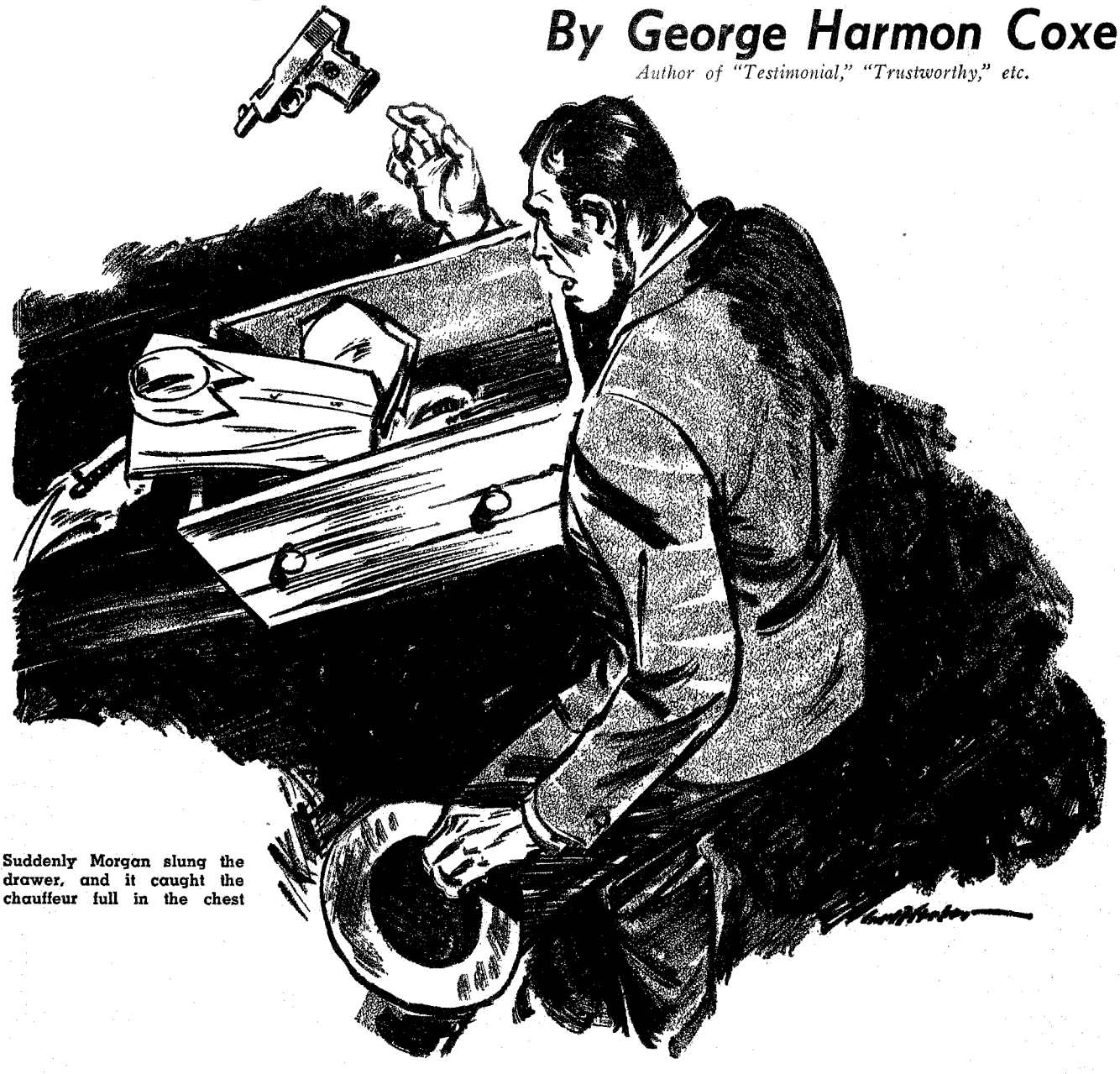
Assignment in Guiana

By George Harmon Coxe

Author of "Testimonial," "Trustworthy," etc.



Suddenly Morgan slung the drawer, and it caught the chauffeur full in the chest

Kerry Snyder watched the girl thoughtfully, a blond giant of a man, standing six foot three and weighing a good two hundred pounds, none of it fat.

"Well," he said finally and shrugged. "Something's gone wrong. Who was around here today?"

"A Captain Doyle came this morning and—"

"Captain Doyle?"

The girl looked up quickly, held by the sharpness of the reply, the sudden darkening of Snyder's eyes. For a long second her glance was questioning, puzzled.

"Do you know him?"

Snyder grunted. "Certainly I know him. He used to be the skipper of the *Hammondsen*. I sacked him not long ago in Para for drunkenness." He paused, his narrowed eyes avoiding hers. "Wonder what he wanted with Johnny."

"I—I don't know," Valery Ward said, a suggestion of indecision in her voice. "But he was here quite a while, and then, this afternoon, someone else called, some man I'd never seen before."

"What did he want?"

"He didn't say. He just wanted to see Johnny. I don't even know how long he was here because I didn't see him leave—"

"Kerry!"

The voice came from across the hall, an impatient, irritated voice, and Snyder grinned wryly at the girl. "Coming," he said, and turned away.

Valery Ward waited until he had gone before she went to the mahogany table between two windows and picked up her book. She did not open it, but stared absently out of the window, a frown puckering the bridge of her nose and her gray eyes still trembled. In the end she went out on the veranda and stood looking up across the tree-lined grounds at the star-studded Guiana sky. The night was lush, fragrant with jasmine and the cloy-

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ing scent of tuberoses from the garden, and in the distance she could hear the strident chorus of the whistling frogs.

When she returned at last to the drawing room the remoteness was still in her eyes, and though she sat down with the book in her lap, she did not open it. From across the hall she could hear the buzz of voices, not distinctly, but enough to differentiate between them, to realize Johnny Hammond was still angry, to sense that Kerry Snyder was keeping his own voice low and controlled. Yet now she was not thinking of these two, but of Lane Morgan, Johnny Hammond's nephew, whom she had never seen. She was sitting just that way, scarcely conscious of her surroundings, when it happened.

The sudden explosion of sound, not loud, but sharp and imperative, brought her to her feet instantly. The book spilled from her lap and as she stood there with the color draining from her face and every muscle tense, there came from across the hall a faint, thudding sound; then she heard a hoarse cry and somehow she was at the door and running across the hall to the doorway of the study beyond.

At the opposite door to the veranda, Kerry Snyder stood as though poised in flight, and even as she stopped he had vanished without a backward glance, his shoes pounding on the steps. There was a crash of shrubbery somewhere outside, a sudden silence. Then she saw the crumpled figure on the floor near the table.

"Johnny!"

She was running again, then dropping to both knees and pulling frantically at his shoulder.

"Johnny!"

Her voice rose in sudden horror. Her desperate tugging finally turned the limp figure on its back. That was when she saw the tiny, red-rimmed hole just in front of and slightly above the right ear.

●

LANE MORGAN stopped beside the man in the beret who was standing at the starboard rail, noting as he did so the tight, bony profile, the tiny mustache, the rimless glasses, the way the bowl of the straight-stemmed pipe was cuddled in one elbow-supported hand.

"Georgetown?" he asked when an arc of light again brightened a long segment of blue-black sky in its quick clean sweep.

The man did not look round. "The Demerara Beacon."

Morgan watched the sky. He could not see the light, only the bright reflection that swept up from the horizon and vanished beyond. Beneath him the engines kept up their steady pulsing and gradually the *S. S. Pandara* began to swing in the almost glassy sea.

"How long'll it take us from here?"

"An hour, hour and a half."

Morgan held up his wristwatch. "We should get in a little after ten then," he said.

"If it wasn't for the bar."

"Oh."

"Mud. From the river. Need high tide." The man spoke in distinct English accents. He shook ashes from the pipe and replaced it between his teeth. "It'll be two o'clock before we dock probably. Customs'll be closed. Go ashore in the morning."

Morgan said, "Oh," again and disappointment settled over him as he realized that all his hurrying in Port of Spain to shift from strato-clipper to ship had been for nothing, that he could as well have waited until tomorrow and taken the flying boat.

He entered the smoking room, selecting a small table in one corner, away from the several larger groups. When he had ordered a drink, he took the cable from an inside pocket and read it again.

NEED YOUR HELP. DO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THIS BUT COME AT ONCE.

HAMMOND

It had been delivered to him in Boston late Thursday night, and now, Sunday night, here he was; for Johnny Hammond was not the sort to make such requests unless they were imperative. Yet there was something strange about the message. Somehow he couldn't imagine Uncle Johnny calling for help from anyone—ever.

HE AWOKE with the ventilating tubes blowing warm air in his face and the steward shaking his shoulder. "It's after nine, sir."

Morgan blinked at him, sat up, and ordered breakfast. By the time the steward returned, his bag was packed. He exchanged it for the orange juice and coffee, and five minutes later he was standing in the passenger port with the sun beating down on him hot and blinding.

Heat simmered up from the water and the wharves as he went down the gangplank to the broad, tin-roofed building below. Here there was shade without coolness, and a wide variety of smells, the most dominant of which seemed to be the slightly sour one of molasses or sugar syrup. There were no other passengers ahead of him now and the Negro customs clerk was polite and considerate as he made but a cursory inspection of the bag. The khaki-clad member of the local constabulary, however, was more thorough. He made inquiries—necessary now because of the war, he explained—took notes, asked to be shown the remainder of the round-trip plane ticket from New York to Trinidad.

By the time the inquisition was over, Morgan was perspiring freely and his hat was slippery on his forehead. He stepped out on Water Street and immediately a half-dozen Negroes in white and khaki mobbed him, each one trying to shout down his competitors.

"Car, sir? Any place in town. . . . Take mine, sir. . . . Got a forty-one model, sir. Right this way. . . !"

The forty-one model won out, grabbing the bag and grinning broadly as he opened the car door.

"The Park," Morgan said, recalling the hotel from his other trip six years ago.

He was aware that he was riding through a clean and well-kept business section where cyclists dodged in and out and snappily dressed native policemen in blue uniforms and caps directed traffic at the corners. The shops were drab but neat, the sidewalks busy. The people were preponderantly black, many ragged and barefoot, some neatly clad. There were East Indians too, and long-skirted women with huge baskets on their heads, and here and there a turbaned Hindu.

Then the driver had swung left and presently they were rolling along an avenue so broad that the grassy mall running down the center was as wide or wider than the pavement flanking it. Here wooden fences closed

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in yards where flowering shrubs were crowded and tangled in jungle density. Towering above them and contrasting sharply with an occasional palm, were strange, irregularly shaped trees that angled oddly over the street and bore their glossy green foliage only near the top like leafy parasols. At a three-story white frame building on a corner, the taxi swung into a curving drive and under a porte-cochere that extended out to the sidewalk. A black bellboy came running down the steps.

"From the *Pandara?*" the clerk asked as Morgan registered. "We have a special rate for cruise passengers."

Morgan studied the girl, thinking that two hours ago he would have given everything away. But not now . . .

Morgan said he wasn't on the cruise. No, he didn't know how long he'd be there. A day perhaps, possibly longer.

The clerk looked disappointed and glanced at the signature. "Oh," he said. "Mr. Morgan? We have a letter for you, I think. . . . Yes." He slipped an envelope from a mail rack.

Morgan glanced at it. Across the face was written his name, nothing more.

"The gentleman who left it wasn't sure you'd stop here," the clerk said, "but he asked us to deliver it in case you did."

Morgan followed the bellboy up the stairs to the left. A third of the way up was a landing. Ahead more stairs led down to a hallway, apparently connecting with a side door and the service quarters to the rear; to the right the staircase was broader, mounting upward to bisect the second-floor hall.

The room proved to be a corner one, the last on the lefthand side. Morgan looked about him when the boy told him where the bath was located, and as soon as he was alone he got rid of his coat and tie. Already the back of the coat was soaked and wrinkled and he made a mental note to order a couple of white drill suits. They made them quickly here in Georgetown, and cheaply.

HE HAD finished putting his things away before he remembered the envelope the clerk had given him. He sat down and opened it. The message had the brevity of a telegram. It said: *"Imperative I see you at the earliest possible moment. Concerns your uncle."* It was signed: *Osborne.*

Grunting softly, he scowled and turned the sheet over. There was nothing more. Just the message on the letterhead of the Tower Hotel and a plain envelope. "Osborne," he said finally. "Who's Osborne?" And then he turned to look at the street outside, seeing in the distance above the parasol-like trees the white twin towers of the cathedral. He was glancing out through the upper half of another shutter at the tin roof extending from below the window to the rear of the building when someone knocked at the door.

The man who entered was small, dark, and wiry. He wore a brown drill suit with a button missing from the coat, and hanging from one hand, which he held across his stomach, was a straw hat green with age.

"Mr. Lane Morgan?"

"Yes."

"I have Mr. Anderson's car for you."

Morgan studied the straight black hair and brown angular face, deciding the fellow was an East Indian—or of that extraction.

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"Mr. Anderson?"

"Yes, sir. He's your uncle's manager. He sends his apologies for not meeting you and says you are to stay at the house. I'm to drive you out."

"Oh," Morgan said. "I see. Well, all right. I'll have to pack. Sit down."

He went over to the closet and pulled out his bag, pushing aside the mosquito netting and opening it on the bed. He took out a suit and folded it.

Osborne, he thought, and now Anderson. Who else am I going to hear from that I don't know? He said, "How did Mr. Anderson know I was here?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. I think someone at the hotel was to let him know in case you did come here."

"Someone telephoned him, you mean," Morgan said.

"Yes, sir."

Morgan put the suit in the bag and when he went for the other one he noticed that the man was still at the door, his small black eyes following every move.

"Well," he said, folding the trousers, "it was quick work."

"Yes, sir. He said if he'd known just when you were arriving he would have met you himself."

"It doesn't matter," Morgan said.

He put the trousers away, began to fold the coat. Not until then did he feel the slightest uncertainty about what he was doing, and this was perhaps understandable because in Lane Morgan's make-up that intangible quality known as instinct had become somewhat atrophied through sheer lack of use. In his well ordered way of living things were not done by instinct but by logic and the process of reasoning. Instinct, if he recognized its presence at all during his twenty-eight years, was something used by women, and some men, as a poor substitute for reasoning.

Even now, instinct awakened somewhat slowly. Had it not been for those few inconsistent words . . .

He straightened, smiling, but not with his eyes. *If he had known just when you were arriving.* . . And Johnny Hammond had said, *Do not acknowledge this.* Johnny wanted secrecy then, didn't he? If so, why should anyone else know that he, Morgan, was arriving at all?

"I've been thinking," he said casually, and noticed for the first time the harried restlessness of the man's eyes, the tight, moist face. "You'll want me to check out of here?"

"Yes, sir." Was there relief in that quick reply? "I'll take your bag to the car."

Things were shaping up. Morgan believed that he could almost feel the tightness settling down over the room, as if it were some kind of pressure chamber, worked from outside.

Morgan moved away from the bed. "Maybe I'd better talk to Mr. Anderson first." He glanced about. There was no telephone in the room. "We could go downstairs and I'll phone him and see what his plans are."

"He says I'm to bring you."

"I know, but I think I'll wait here until—"

He was walking as he spoke, reaching for the door. Then he was standing very still, the sentence unfinished in his throat; for the straw hat had flicked back now and in the right hand, the muzzle angling up at him, was a snub-nosed automatic.

"Stay there!" the man said, and slid along the wall, putting distance between them.

CHAPTER II

SHORT LESSON IN PERIL

WHEN he could think again, Lane Morgan saw that right hand was still half extended, and lowered it. Gradually his taut nerves loosened and took up their accustomed duties. He made no other move, nor did the man with the gun. About five feet away now, his back against the wall, he stood waiting, his mouth thin and dampness glistening from his brow. Somewhere down the hall a door slammed and outside the window an automobile started up.

"Pack your things," the man ordered.

"All right," Morgan turned, his movement deliberately casual.

He had never faced a gun before, although he had sometimes wondered how he would act in the face of one, and never in his life had he known any grave personal peril. Now he felt no fear—in the sense that his life was in danger—because it was too preposterous. This man wasn't going to shoot. He couldn't shoot; he must realize the situation was impossible.

"Get along with that packing!"

Morgan pushed the bag to one side and sat down. "Suppose I just sit here. Do you mean to tell me—"

He broke off and a sudden tingling ran along his nerve-ends. Then he found himself standing again, held by something in the man's stare, and for the first time really aware of the danger. This man *would* shoot. And for a very real and understandable reason. He was scared! Perspiration was leaking down his face and his hand was shaking. His eyes, too, had a desperate, hunted look, like an animal cornered and defiant. In his present condition logic could not touch him. He had been given a job to do. His mind was made up and if he had to, he would act.

"All right." Morgan shrugged. "But it's pretty silly, thinking you can get away with anything like this."

"I have to get you out," the man said.

Morgan pretended to be fixing things in his bag. He went leisurely to the dresser and opened a drawer. He carried some things to the bag, talking all the time but not paying much attention to what he said because suddenly he was thinking of something else.

What about Johnny Hammond?

HIS mind folded back. As a boy he had thought of Uncle Johnny as a mysterious, exciting figure, the kind one read about in books—unpredictable, adventurous, always on the go. Somehow the idea had remained with Morgan that this was still the case. Six years ago when Johnny had offered him a trip to British Guiana as a graduation present, he had found his uncle working some diamond claim along a jungle river. Since then Morgan had seen him but once—the time Hammond flew to New York unexpectedly on business—and had heard from him but twice.

The first letter had come two years ago when Johnny had broken a hip, and had asked why Morgan didn't come down and keep an eye on things while Johnny was mending. But at that time there had been good reason for staying home. After four years as a fledgling architect, Morgan was being taken in the firm as a junior partner and he had written to say he'd have to stay in

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Boston. That was the last he'd heard from Johnny until the second letter eight weeks before.

This had been a different sort of letter. There had been Johnny's usual attempt at good humor and casualness, but this time it did not come off. There was an undertone of earnestness and pathos more moving than the message itself. Morgan could see two of those sentences now: *The croakers tell me I'll be lucky to last the year out, son, so come down soon. Some of these things of mine will be yours some day and I'd like to teach you the ropes.*

So Morgan had sent off an airmail letter the following day. Sure he'd come. He was up to his ears on a job important to national defense and it would take about two months to finish it. He could come for a few days if Johnny wanted it that way, but wouldn't it be better to finish the job and get a leave of absence and come ready to stay a while? If Johnny wanted him at once, cable; if not he'd be down just as soon as he could.

That's the way things had been when the cable had come. He had finished the United Air Industries Building and already applied for a leave. All the cable did was hurry him by a few days— There it was again! That cable. Johnny needed help and the wording indicated secrecy was essential. Yet someone had found out about that cable. Something had happened to Johnny's plans. What that something was, Morgan made no attempt to guess; it was enough to know that a trap had been laid and he had nearly walked into it.

NOW he moved back to the dresser, his jaw hard and stubborn but a grin on his lips, certain now that no matter what happened he had to find out about Johnny first.

"Okay," he said, aware that the man had not spoken. "But it's still pretty silly. Why don't you tell me what it's about and—"

"Finish please!"

Morgan measured distances as he took handkerchiefs from the drawer. The fellow had moved back to the door. He wasn't very far away now. By spinning and reaching out Morgan wouldn't miss the gun by more than a foot or two. . . Then, with his hands on the drawer, he knew how to do it.

He put the shirts and shorts on the dresser, not looking at the man now, and stopped to glance farther back in the drawer, pulling it out as he did so. He pulled too far and the drawer slid from its grooves and fell on one foot.

He said, "Damn it!" and reached for the drawer. He grunted softly and straightened up, still not looking at the fellow, but wedging one corner of the drawer in his right hand. Then he spun abruptly to his left, guiding the drawer as he swung, seeing the quick alarm on the other's face as he tried to draw back and get the gun clear.

It was all over before Morgan realized it. His swing was swift and deft and he saw the edge of the drawer hit the automatic and send it spinning against the wall. He felt the drawer tear from his grasp with the impact, and with momentum carrying him forward he moved in naturally enough and felt his fist smash against the brown jaw.

The jar ran along his arm and he found the shock a pleasant one, awakening long forgotten memories. It was a nice sort of feeling to see the man go down. It was so much simpler than he had expected. He stepped past and picked up the gun.

The man was surprised too, and afraid again. He was on his back, the hat still atop his head. He got his elbows under him and lay there making no attempt to get up when he saw the gun.

"You had it in your hand when you came in, didn't you?" Morgan said. "Under the hat. You were going to talk me into going if you could and if you couldn't—" He broke off, hesitated. "Who sent you?"

The man's lips tightened. Morgan moved up until he was standing at the other's feet.

"All right," he said. "We'll see if the police can—"

He got that far and then it happened. He was never sure just how the fellow managed, but it was a very neat demonstration that there is more to the business of self-defense than a punch in the jaw. One instant Morgan was standing at the man's feet; the next he was falling.

Without seeming to move, something came to life in the man's legs. A toe caught firmly behind Morgan's heel and a foot jammed backward against the same knee. Morgan made a futile effort to maintain balance with his other leg, but it was no good; the pressure on his trapped foot sent him quickly backward and he fell heavily against the bed and bounced to the floor.

He rolled over and came up with the gun in his hand, ready to meet the expected attack. By that time the man was already at the rear window, squirming through the lower shutter. Morgan yelled at him. He heard the fellow hit the tin roof as he ran round the bed and when he reached the window the other was at the end of the extention.

Morgan snapped up the gun, aimed, seeing the man's face as he turned to slip over the edge. For the space of a watch tick the man's eyes caught his own and he saw the look of terror in the brown face, and he stood there aiming, his finger touching the trigger, tightening, steadying, holding it. The man slid over the edge of the roof, caught it with his hands and dropped.

WHEN Morgan lowered the gun, reaction set in and fear laid hold of him. Not from what had happened, but from the certain knowledge that he had nearly pulled the trigger. The knowledge left him weak and shaken. He turned and sat down. He looked at the gun with distaste, put it on the bed, realizing now that his shirt was soaked through. He took it off, slipped out of the undershirt and poured water in the bowl.

By the time he had dried himself his nerves had steadied and he walked to the window and stared out, a compactly built man, not tall, but with a way of carrying himself that got the most out of his height. Stripped, his torso was well-proportioned, the muscles flat across the shoulders and stomach and the chest upward-arching and deep, indicating a physical fitness that was not apparent in street clothes. His hair had the tint of copper in it and his chin was good, with lines in the jaw that suggested he could be pretty stubborn at times in spite of his easy manner. Now there was an unaccustomed grimness to his face as he turned away; his brown eyes remained somber until he looked at the push button beside the door.

Morgan rang and when the boy came he ordered a drink. He had put on a clean shirt and tie when the boy

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Valery Ward

came back, and when he had finished the drink he picked up the automatic. Apparently of Spanish manufacture, it was fully loaded, and he was about to put it in a drawer when he changed his mind and slipped it in his hip pocket. He put on his coat and went downstairs.

"Do you know a man named Hammond?" he asked the desk clerk. "Johnny Hammond?"

The clerk eyed him curiously. "I did," he said finally. "I guess nearly everyone knew him."

"*Knew* him?"

"He was killed last week." The clerk was still watching him closely. "Shot."

Morgan stared, the color draining from his face. Something caught at his throat and inside him there was no longer any warmth. He heard himself asking questions as he fought to keep his voice level.

His thoughts were spinning as the meager details were unfolded. It was hard to stand here and pretend that you were merely shocked and interested when something inside was torn and sick and you suddenly felt so bewildered and alone. Johnny Hammond shot? Had he some premonition when he cabled? . . . He tried to recall the reason that had brought him to the desk, and spoke up to hide his sorrow and despondency.

"I didn't know," he said. "I wanted to ask you about a Mr. Anderson. Did Mr. Hammond have an assistant by that name?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"You don't know any Anderson that ever worked for him?"

The clerk thought it over and shook his head. "No. I'm afraid I don't."

Morgan thanked him and walked to the telephone alcove. So Anderson was a phony, as he had suspected? A name only, given to the gunman to use by someone who knew that he, Morgan, would never suspect anything was wrong. He looked up Hammond's number and when he had it he didn't know what to say. Whom should he ask for? How much should he pretend to know? According to the information in the cable he had received, he should know nothing of Hammond's death.

A woman answered, her voice resonant and faintly accented.

"Is Mr. Hammond there?"

There was a pause; then: "Who is this, please?"

"Mr. Morgan. Lane Morgan."

"Oh—" the voice said, and suddenly it was no longer low and resonant, but curt and cold and measured. "Then you *did* get my cable. I'm Valery Ward."

What cable? That was what Morgan was about to say, but he checked himself in time. He had had no cable but the one signed *Hammond.* Yet it was obvious that this woman believed he had received one from her. Who was she and what had she cabled? Suddenly he found the impulse that checked him a good one and knew that from now on he would offer no information nor take any step until he was sure of his ground.

CHAPTER III

THE LADY IS AN ENEMY

THE house Johnny Hammond had lived in was set well back on a large corner lot. Cabbage palms lined the two streets, and hibiscus and bougainvillea bordered the garden on the one side and the driveway on the other. The house itself, a wooden bungalow type with a veranda on three sides, was perched well above the ground and supported by piles. From the front, a walk led to the veranda steps, but Morgan's chauffeur cut into the drive and stopped beside another set of steps on the side.

He got out and told the man to wait. Someone walked across the veranda as he turned, and when Morgan looked up a blond giant in shirt and khaki shorts was moving toward the steps. Morgan went up and the man offered his hand.

"I'm Kerry Snyder," he said. "Come in."

He stepped aside at an open doorway and Morgan passed in front of him, finding himself in a sizable room, two walls of which were mostly windows and doors. In spite of this the place seemed dark after the brilliant sunshine, and he did not see the girl until Snyder spoke.

"This is Miss Ward."

Then Morgan saw her. Standing between the two windows in a red-and-white-checked gingham dress, she was a slender, tallish girl, with a beauty so striking that for a moment he could only stare at her.

"How do you do, Miss Ward," he said.

She had not moved since he entered, and now he saw that her eyes were not blue but gray—gray and cold and direct. She bowed slightly.

"So nice of you to come, Mr. Morgan."

Her cool sarcasm struck through him, and then Snyder was speaking.

"Miss Ward was Johnny's—well, combination private secretary and protegé. And I guess you'd call me his right-hand man. . . . Look, can't we sit down. Would you like a drink?"

"No, thanks."

Snyder pushed a wicker chair toward the girl and indicated a canvas one for Morgan. "If we'd known when you were coming we could have met you," he said.

Morgan looked at him. There it was again—almost

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the same phrase the gunman had used in the hotel room: *If we'd known when you were coming . . .*

"I wasn't sure myself," he said.

Valery Ward sat down. Her legs were brown and bare and she wore sandals. She kept her glance away from Morgan and he thought: Now what? She had sent him a cable, or inferred that she had. To find out what it was all about he'd have to do some fencing. He did not expect to be very good at it but he had nothing to lose by trying.

"When did it happen?" he asked.

"Last Thursday," Snyder said.

Morgan nodded. That was the night he had received the cable. "How was he shot?"

Snyder, lighting a cigarette, looked up suddenly, brows puckering. Morgan saw him exchange glances with the girl. The room seemed strangely quiet now and he watched her uncross her legs and lean forward, her gaze puzzled and narrow.

"How did you know?" she said. "In the cable I used the word, killed."

Thanks, Morgan said to himself. Thanks a lot for the lift. Aloud he said, "I talked for a minute with the hotel clerk."

Lane Morgan

"IT WAS in the study," Snyder was saying, and he gestured across the center hall. "I was with him, going over some things at the table. Somebody must have crept up on the edge of the veranda. Fired through the window. It was a second or two before I realized what had happened." He shrugged and dropped his glance. "By the time I got outside it was too late."

"Too late?" Morgan said. "They don't know who did it? No one's been caught?"

"Not yet."

"But they must suspect someone. Have some idea."

"If they have they're keeping it to themselves. They found the empty shell, that's about all."

Morgan thought over a lot of things in the next brief silence. Something was terribly wrong here and he was a little amazed at his own secretiveness. He was, he decided, learning fast. Two hours ago he would have given everything away.

Two hours ago that would have been the sensible thing to do, and he was a sensible man. But at times he was a stubborn man as well, and that's what made the difference. Someone had wanted to prevent him from making this call, had sent a gunman with a trumped up story to make certain he did not interfere. With what? How could he interfere when he did not even know what this was all about?

He found himself watching the girl. Her frown left tiny ridges above her nose and her glance had strayed out the window. In spite of the worry that clogged his thoughts her loveliness was like a magnet and he had to look at her whenever he could. Presently, as if aware of his inspection, she turned.

"We didn't know whether you were coming or not," she said. "I asked you to advise me and when I didn't hear—"

"I know," Morgan said and summoned the best excuse he could think of. "I wasn't sure how far I'd fly or just when I'd arrive. After I'd taken the boat at Trinidad the reply didn't seem so important. I'm sorry. It was inexcusable."

Snyder walked to the door and leaned against the frame, looking out. An uncomfortable silence settled upon the room again, and when Valery Ward continued to remain pointedly unaware of him, Morgan stood up.

"Well, I'll run along then. Goodbye, Miss Ward, and thanks for cabling me."

"Not at all." The girl rose and came along to the door with him. "I dare say you'll want to know about your uncle's affairs, and if I can be of any help—"

"Thanks."

"Yes," Snyder said. "You'll want to have a chat with Girouard, he's Johnny's lawyer. And very likely the police. You'll be around for a while, won't you? I'll stop by the Park. We'll have a drink."

Morgan had moved out on the veranda. Valery Ward came up beside Snyder and he put an arm about her shoulders. It was a casual sort of gesture but something about the way he did it irritated Morgan, and for a moment or two he studied the man.

About thirty, he thought, with strong regular features, a bronzed skin, and the easy carefree way of a man who knows what he wants and intends to get it. He was very blond, the brows above his blue eyes sun-bleached to a straw color. Standing close to him like this, Morgan appreciated his magnificent build. Yet it wasn't his size alone that Morgan resented, nor that he was so handsome—he even had a cleft in his chin—it wasn't just the smiling insolence of his eyes. It was a combination of the three plus the fact that he had his arm around Valery Ward's shoulders.

As for the girl, she waited politely, looking through Morgan with no more warmth in her gray eyes than when she had first seen him. All right. So she didn't like him.

"Yes," Morgan said. "Do that. We'll have a drink. Oh, by the way, do you know a man named Osborne?"

"Osborne?" Snyder cocked his head. "We don't know any Osborne, do we, Val?"

The girl said she didn't.

"Or a Mr. Anderson?"

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"Why, yes." Snyder looked at Valery and she nodded. "There's a John Anderson in the bank."

"This was Ralph Anderson," Morgan said, making up his story as he went along. "But he probably wouldn't be here now. I met him when I was here before."

"Oh," Valery Ward said.

"Six years ago," Morgan said. "You weren't here then."

"I might have been," she said. "But not with Johnny."

"Her family had a plantation here for over twenty years," Snyder said.

"Perhaps she'll show me around before I leave," Morgan said and went down the steps to his car.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEWILDERED LAW

COLONEL FORSYTHE, Inspector General of the Georgetown police, was a tall, portly man in his late fifties with a rugged, bushy-browed face and keen blue eyes. His khaki uniform, nicely faded from countless washings, had a swank all its own and across the breast pocket was a double row of service ribbons. He was standing behind his desk when Lane Morgan was ushered into his office and he offered a cigarette and a chair before he sat down.

"I just thought I'd stop in," Morgan said, once the preliminaries were over.

"Yes. Hmm. Glad you did. Fact is, we haven't made much progress. We haven't made any, damn it!" Forsythe sat up suddenly and a look of relief spread across his ruddy face. "I say, would you mind talking to Captain Goodspeed? He's our deputy inspector and head of the B. C. I." He pressed a button on his desk. "Not that I'm trying to rush you off, you understand, but Goodspeed's in touch with things. It's his case, really. . . . Ah, Captain."

The man who entered was dressed like Forsythe minus the service ribbons. Swarthy, smooth-shaven, and no more than average height, he had intense black eyes that centered on Morgan and never left him until he had finished shaking hands.

"This is Mr. Morgan," Forsythe said. "Johnny Hammond's nephew. Just down from the States."

"On the *Pandara*," Goodspeed said.

"Was he? Well, take him along, will you? Tell him what we know about this business."

"There's no point in beating around the bush," Goodspeed said when he had closed his office door. "We're up against blank wall. That doesn't mean we don't get to the bottom of it eventually—I think we will. But right now we're stymied."

"I'd like to know what you have," Morgan said.

Goodspeed leaned back in his chair and built a steeple with his fingers, repeating much the same details Morgan had got from Snyder and the hotel clerk. "So we had two stories—Miss Ward's and Snyder's," he said finally. "Miss Ward had settled down to read. When the shot came she jumped up, hurried across the room and the hall. As she reached the study Snyder was at the door of the veranda, just running out. She saw Hammond on the floor but it was all so unexpected that she didn't know what had happened until she saw the hole in his head."

"Snyder was at the veranda door when she saw him?" Morgan said.

Goodspeed nodded. "And his story doesn't help much either. When the shot came he looked up and saw Hammond start to topple. It took him a second or two to realize what had happened. That's what he says, although it probably took him longer than that. In any case he finally ran out on the veranda, saw it was empty and went down the steps to the yard. It was dark. The grounds are full of shrubs. He couldn't see anything. There wasn't any car."

"Where did you find the shell?"

"On the ground at the edge of the veranda. We believe the killer crept up the steps, partway at least, and fired from there."

A MAN seen at a doorway, Morgan thought, could be going either in or out, depending on the impression he wanted to convey. Aloud he said, "It isn't much, is it? But you must have had some suspects."

Goodspeed smiled. "Anyone associated with a murdered man is a suspect, at least to some degree. Miss Ward could be a suspect if we had a motive. Snyder was a suspect—there could be collusion, you know. So was Girouard, Hammond's lawyer. Atlock, the manager of a gold claim Hammond was interested in up the Potaro River. There was also a Captain Doyle, a former master of one of Hammond's freighters; and a man we have not yet been able to identify. There is a chap named Van Orman who is here to buy the Hammond line ships."

"You've eliminated all of them?"

"Not entirely, no," Goodspeed said. "Miss Ward and Snyder have straightforward stories and no apparent motive. Neither has Girouard. Further, according to Mrs. Girouard, he hadn't left the house since he came in around six. Atlock and Doyle have good alibis and Van Orman no recognizable motive. He wanted to buy the ships and still does."

Morgan lit a cigarette and a feeling of helplessness and depression settled over him. He could not get Valery Ward out of his mind. He did not blame her for her resentment, believing as she did that he had been too indifferent to answer her cable; yet, somehow, he had the feeling that her dislike of him was more intense and deep-seated than that.

He saw that Goodspeed was watching him and cleared his throat. "That other man you mentioned," he said. "The one you haven't identified. What about him?"

"I wish I knew." Goodspeed grunted and his lids came down. "Captain Doyle saw Hammond the day he was killed—in the morning. The chap I refer to came about two that afternoon. Snyder was in Parika so he didn't see the fellow. Miss Ward did, but got hardly more than a glimpse when he arrived. He was with Hammond about an hour. At tea time Girouard came for another hour or so and Snyder got back just before dinner. That's what happened that day. But Miss Ward's description of the man was sketchy and we haven't been able to find out who he is. By the way, have you talked with Girouard?"

"I wanted to talk to you first," Morgan said.

"You don't know about the will then?"

Morgan shook his head. "I meant to ask you."

"It's not my place, of course," Goodspeed said. "Girouard'll give you the details, but as I get it there were three main provisions. First there was an assignment of

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the sugar estate to Miss Ward. Her father, now dead, and Hammond were partners and so it becomes hers, and her brother's. Second, an outright bequest of a hundred thousand to you—"

"That much? I had no idea—"

"No?" Goodspeed waited, his gaze speculative. "Well, that was the figure, I believe, and the balance goes to Snyder."

"Oh," Morgan said, and then put into words the suspicion that had bothered him from the first. "I don't know what that balance is, nor do I care particularly. But has it occurred to you that Snyder could have killed my uncle? Is there any reason why he could not have stepped out on the porch, fired the shot and then stepped to the doorway so that when Miss Ward saw him he could *appear* to be running out?"

"No reason that I know of."

"He had the motive."

"Hardly that," Goodspeed said and shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not. That's what stopped us."

"But he inherits—"

"Yes." Goodspeed leaned across the desk and took pains with his words. "Didn't you know your uncle had leukemia?"

Suddenly the room was stifling and Morgan felt a little sick. So that was it? Leukemia. That casual, lighthearted letter had been written by a dying man who had not even bothered to answer Morgan's reply. Why hadn't Johnny told the truth? Why hadn't he answered?

"Apparently," Goodspeed went on, "he'd had it for some time but he wouldn't go to a doctor and find out—until about three months ago. The testimony at the inquest showed that at that time Hammond had been given no longer than six months to live."

"I didn't know," Morgan said.

Goodspeed shook his head again and leaned back. "It won't wash. Why should a man commit murder for something that he will get by merely waiting for Death to take its course?"

Morgan took his hat off his knee and stood up, his face grave and trouble in his eyes.

"You'll be around a while?" Goodspeed asked.

"I'm at the Park," Morgan said. "If anything develops—"

"We'll get in touch with you," Goodspeed said, and shook hands.

CHAPTER V

WATCH THE SHADOWS

WHEN Lane Morgan got back to the hotel there was a note in his box saying that Henri Girouard had telephoned. He took the slip to his room and tossed it on the dresser and then, as he got rid of his coat and tie, he remembered the note from Osborne and looked around for it.

He pawed through his things in the drawer and glanced in the waste basket. Then, noticing that the washstand had been tidied and fresh towels left, he decided the maid had carried it off. In any case, it did not matter; he'd go see Mr. Osborne just as soon as he cooled off and got clean clothes on.

It was after four when he reached the Tower Hotel. The desk clerk told him that Mr. Osborne was not in, but would probably be in later.

"Who shall I say called, sir?"

Morgan hesitated. Obeying some impulse that warned him not to commit himself until he could be more sure of his position, he said:

"It doesn't matter. I'll stop by later—or phone him."

Morgan's driver knew where Henri Girouard lived and after a short ride the car pulled up in front of a white

Morgan turned to see a woman of such striking beauty that he could only stare

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frame structure, built high off the ground like the Hammond bungalow but consisting of two stories. A colored maid answered his knock and he gave his name and stepped into the hall while she disappeared through a doorway at the right. When she came back a man was with her.

"Well, Mr. Morgan, how very good of you to come," he said, and shook hands vigorously, a slim, lithe man, dark and quick-moving. He had a thin, high nose and beneath it a mustache waxed and pointed. "I heard you came in on the *Pandara* this morning. Tried to get in touch with you. Come in. Come in."

"I got the message," Morgan said and felt himself being steered through the doorway.

"Splendid. You're just in time for tea."

"I didn't mean to barge in."

"Nonsense. . . . Tasha!" Henri Girouard called back over his shoulder but did not stop. "Tea isn't the institution with you it is with us, is it? Maybe you'd like a whiskey and soda first."

Morgan guessed not, thanks, and glanced about while Girouard rattled on. He was in a large rectangular room running the depth of the house. The floors were bare but well kept, the furniture was simple, and there were tables everywhere, small and large, of rich dark woods and littered with a profusion of silver ornaments and antiques.

"Ah, there you are," Girouard said.

THERE was a step behind Morgan and he turned. In the doorway was a woman, and for the second time that day he gazed upon a beauty so striking that for some seconds he could do nothing but stare.

"Tasha, this is Mr. Morgan—my wife."

She smiled and offered her hand. He took it, absorbing the picture of this woman. She was as dark as Valery Ward was fair; her hair was raven-black and drawn straight back to a tight bun on the nape of her neck. She was about his own age, he thought, a large woman, not bulky, but sleek and full-breasted, nearly as tall as her husband and quite as dark except for her skin which had the texture and color of rich thick cream.

"How do you do, Mr. Morgan?" she said. Her voice was a husky contralto and as she spoke she lowered her lashes and released her hand. "Shall we go in?"

"You don't know what you miss, not having tea," Girouard said, when they were seated. "To me it's the most important meal of the day."

Morgan ran his eye over some of the things on the table—a plate of thin sandwiches, cookies, scones, a layer cake, toast, individual meat pies, jams, jellies.

"With us," he said, "tea is tea and a piece of toast, with cinnamon possibly. That's the difference. . . . With lemon, please," he said to the woman.

Girouard attacked his food with gusto, and when he had satisfied himself they moved to the front of the room. "You might get some Scotch," Girouard said to his wife, "in case we want it. . . . I suppose you'd like to know about the will, Morgan?"

Morgan said he would, watching the woman's quick, passing glance before she turned and left the room. Girouard did not rise when his wife came in with a tray and glasses, and he put them down on a coffee table and started away. At the door she turned.

"You'll come again, won't you, Mr. Morgan?"

"I'd like to," Morgan said.

"For dinner, perhaps. We might have some people in, Henri."

"What—oh, yes. By all means."

THEN she was gone and Girouard had begun to explain the terms of Johnny Hammond's will. Morgan heard him out, realizing now how little he really knew about his uncle, how many things he must find out.

"I had no idea," he said, "that Johnny had so many strings to his bow."

Girouard raised a brow. "We considered him a pretty wealthy man. He had an offer of $820,000 for those six old freighters alone—and by the way, that's something I want to discuss with you. There's a buyer been waiting for nearly a week to close the deal. Actually, of course, you haven't much to say about it, but you could contest the will, I suppose. That would tie things up. What I'd like to do is have you sign a release—after you've satisfied yourself that everything is in order, of course."

"All right." Morgan glanced at his watch. It was five-thirty and he regretted the hour lost over tea. "But I think I've imposed on you enough for one afternoon. Why can't I see you tomorrow at your office?"

"You can. But as long as you're here—"

Morgan stood up and grinned. "As a matter of fact, I'd like to order a couple of white suits before the shops close."

Girouard looked at his watch, twisting one end of his mustache in a tighter point.

"I'm afraid they're closed now. Although there is a place that might be open. Chap named Joseph. On Queen Street—that's between High and Water about a block from the post office. I'll run you down if you like."

"I have a driver outside. And while I'm on the subject, where could I rent a car? By the day or week, I mean?"

"Quentin's." Girouard had risen and was walking slowly to the doorway. "I'll phone them for you. . . . It's no trouble," he said as Morgan started to protest, and presently he was in the hall talking to someone named Harry.

"Friend of mine staying at the Park. . . . That's right, by the day or week . . . . Wait and I'll ask him. He has an Austin, a Morris and a Ford," he said to Morgan. "Which do you think you'd like?"

Morgan said he thought the Ford would do and Girouard relayed the information. "When do you want it? He'll need a little time to get it in shape."

"After dinner. Say, eight-thirty?"

"I'll have him bring it up and you can drive him back. All right?"

Morgan said that would be fine and Girouard concluded the deal. "Now about tomorrow," he said. "How would two o'clock suit you? All right? We'll go over everything then. I understand how you feel about things. It was a frightful shock to all of us and the worst of it is the police are getting nowhere—or if they are they're keeping mum about it."

He brushed aside Morgan's thanks for the tea and shook hands. He was standing in the doorway fingering his mustache when Morgan drove off.

IT WAS nearly six-thirty when Morgan got back to the hotel, having ordered two drill suits with delivery promised the following evening. Now, feeling the need

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of a drink, he ran into Mr. Smith, the hotel's colored major-domo in the lobby. Mr. Smith was bowing and beaming, and Morgan asked where the bar was.

"Right downstairs, Mr. Morgan. Have you ever seen a planter's punch made?" he asked, personally escorting his guest down the stairs.

"Yes, I have," Morgan said.

Mr. Smith registered disappointment, but showed the way into a low-ceilinged room the principal features of which were a pool table—an enormous-looking affair—and a small bar, presided over by a rotund Negro.

"This is Mr. Morgan, Walter." Walter showed white teeth. "Walter will mix you anything you want," Mr. Smith said. "I sugested a planter's punch for Mr. Morgan, Walter, but—"

"I want a short drink," Morgan said, "and simple."

"May I suggest a rum swizzle?"

Morgan turned. A man he had not noticed before was rising from a table, a glass in his hand. He was a small man, dried and wrinkled, his eyes a watery blue behind his pince nez.

"I think you'll find it both short and simple. . . . Come, Walter, a swizzle for Mr. Morgan and myself."

Morgan was trapped and he knew it. He had no desire to talk to anyone, let alone a stranger, and while he searched for an excuse to flee, he stood helplessly, watching the man extract a card from a worn leather case.

The card was offered with a bow and a none too steady hand, and Morgan noticed the frayed cuff of the white suit and the shirt underneath. The card identified the man as Mr. C. C. Caswell, Assistant Supervisor of the Georgetown Library.

Morgan mumbled, "How do you do," and Caswell said, "Most happy to meet you, Mr. Morgan . . . ."

Walter was spinning a swizzle stick between his palms. He removed it from the pitcher and poured into two small glasses a brownish concoction with a half-inch bead on it.

"Chin-chin," said Caswell. And tipping back his head, poured the drink down his throat in one quick motion.

Morgan tested the mixture, which seemed to be chiefly rum, water, bitters, and a touch of sugar syrup, and found it not too bad.

Caswell was smiling. "You approve? But you must learn to drink them as we do, with the head still on. Have you been here before, Mr. Morgan?"

"Once. Six years ago," Morgan said, and for a moment he forgot about Caswell and sadness came to him as he recalled those two weeks he'd spent with Johnny. Improperly conditioned by background and environment, he had looked upon the trip up-country to Johnny's diamond claim with the bored superiority of the very young, finding the taste of adventure nothing more than an unpleasant nightmare of heat, mosquitoes, bad food and jungle.

Caswell was still cross-questioning him. "Here on business, Mr. Morgan?"

"In a way." Morgan finished his drink and reached for some change. "How much, Walter?"

"No, no." Caswell put up his hand. "This is my pleasure, Mr. Morgan. I'm only too glad—"

"All right," Morgan said, realizing that Caswell was well versed in the art of holding his man. "Once again, Walter."

"If I can be of any help," Caswell said. "I've been here nineteen years and. . ."

Walter poured the drinks. Morgan, not yet equal to the one gulp system, drank as hurriedly as he could.

"How much, Walter?"

Walter glanced at Caswell. "For all of them, sir, or just—"

"All of them."

"Oh, I say now—" Caswell began.

"Well, there's your two," Walter said, "and five for Mr. Caswell. That's seven—forty-two cents, sir."

"Now, now," Caswell said. "I insist," he said, and insisted no more.

THE car was delivered as promised, a two-year old phaeton that was practically as shiny as when it left the factory. It was a right-hand drive and Morgan found the left-hand gear shift awkward and had to concentrate when he used it. He drove the chauffeur back to the garage and went in to make a deposit; then he loafed slowly up South Street, turned left, continuing past the cathedral and the parade grounds.

It was dark and quiet here, the wide, tree-lined street deserted. The night was brilliant and fragrant, and now and then he caught a chorus of whistling frogs. Peepers he would have called them at home and their strident chatter brought nostalgia and loneliness. He knew what he wanted to do—turn around and drive to Johnny Hammond's bungalow, and talk to Valery Ward; to hear her voice and make her talk to him and ask why they couldn't be friends. Tomorrow he would go, but tonight he did not have the courage, and he drove straight on until he came to the railroad track, turning left here and swinging back to the hotel.

Passing the side door, he noticed a khaki-clad figure standing in the shadows close to the building—a blocky figure, it was, with a tiny red glow marking the cigarette in his mouth. But Morgan went on with no more than a glance, rounded the corner and climbed to the main entrance, passing a man on the steps but not recognizing him until a voice addressed him.

"Good evening, Mr. Morgan."

Good Lord, thought Morgan, has he been here all this time? "Good evening, Mr. Caswell," he said and went on in without slowing down.

He had taken the key to his room with him, so he went directly up, unlocked the door absently and stepped inside. A peculiar, acrid odor came to him at once and he sniffed suspiciously, wondering about it. Then, just as he felt for the light switch, he heard something and stiffened in his tracks, his arms outstretched.

It was a curious sound, flat and metallic, and coming not from the room, but from outside. But it was close, very close, and he waited, breath held and every sense alert, seeing the ghostly tent-like shape of the one drawn mosquito net half-silhouetted against a window. Suddenly he identified the smell—something had been burning—and with it came an overwhelming premonition of danger.

It could have been no more than a fraction of a second that he stood there in the darkness; then, more faintly this time, he heard a recurrence of the sound that warned him and knew what it was.

Someone was on the roof!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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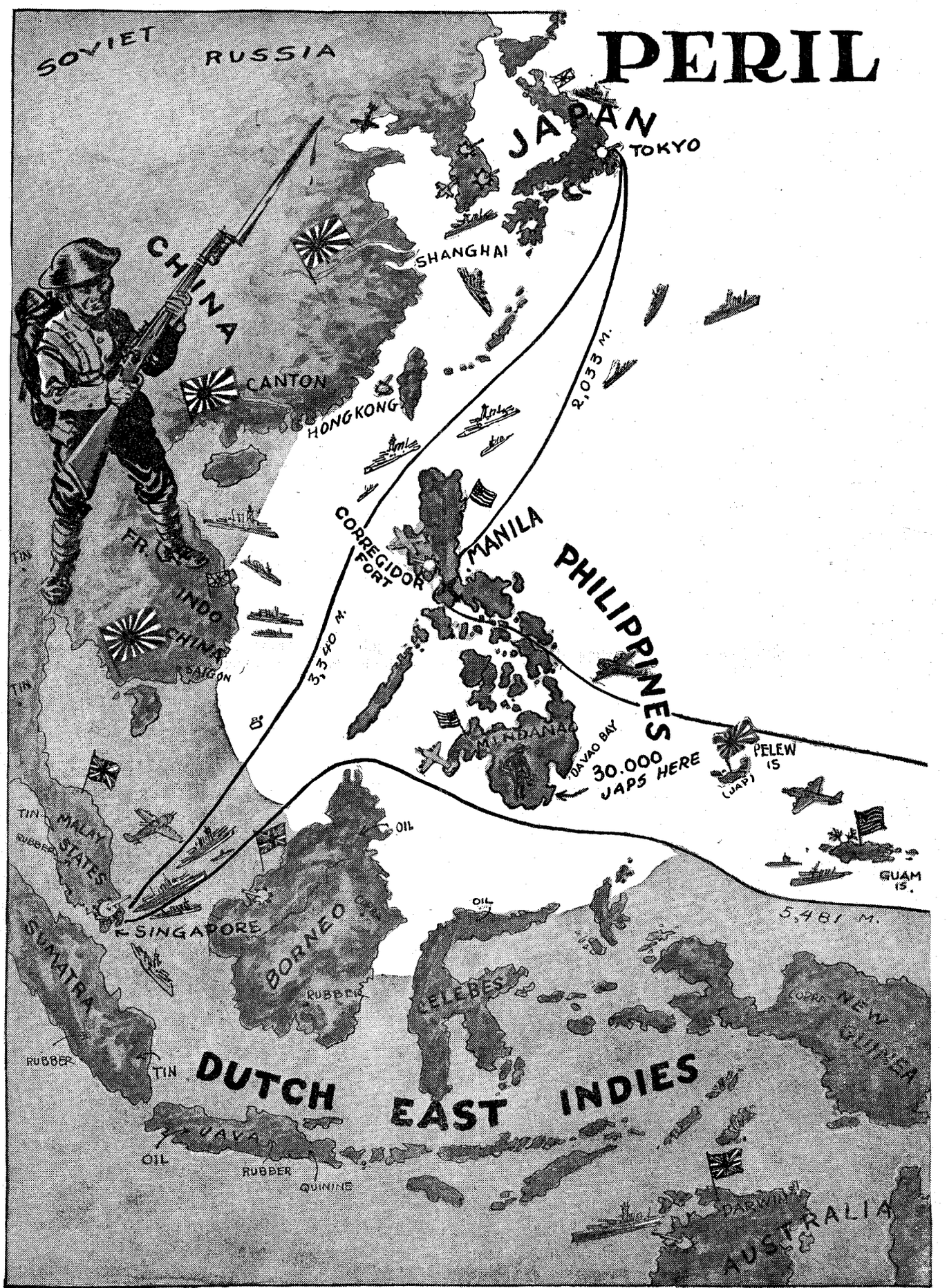

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in the PACIFIC

The head-hunters are ready to sweep down from the hills for an orgy of murder; the Mikado's little men are ready with warships and wiles. Do the Philippine politicians really dare to face July 4, 1946? Do they really want freedom? The answers to these questions give every American something to think about

By E. Hoffmann Price

THE BANDS played. The politicos made speeches. The crowds cheered, and paraded, and sang, intoxicated by a draught far more heady than American whiskey. They were drunk on freedom: independence. The land was theirs. It was Utopia, now; for their leaders had told them it would be.

Meanwhile the politicos, having made their speeches, went home to sweat and pray and jump at shadows. For they knew what was happening, even then. Up in the hills, Moros were sharpening murderous *kris*, dreaming of Christian heads and Mohammedan Paradise, complete with a select assortment of dusky *houris*. Down in the valleys, the little brown men and their families made ready for the Mikado's equivalent of *der Tag*.

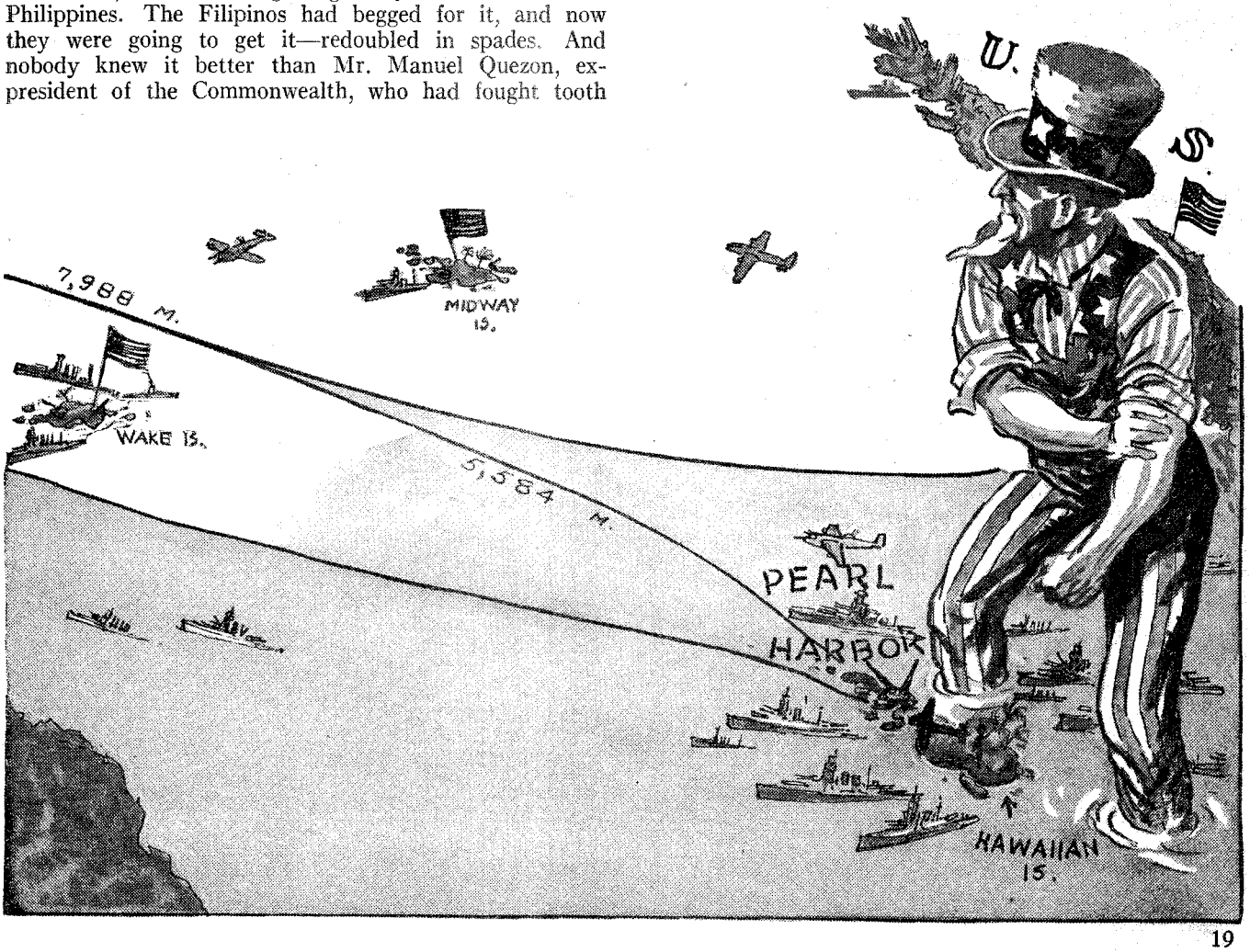
In short, all Hell was getting ready to descend on the Philippines. The Filipinos had begged for it, and now they were going to get it—redoubled in spades. And nobody knew it better than Mr. Manuel Quezon, ex-president of the Commonwealth, who had fought tooth and nail for Philippine independence—and hoped in his heart that it would never happen.

* * *

And maybe it won't happen, this preview of a date that has made a lot of Filipinos nervous: July 4, 1946. Independence Day. Uncle Sammy can pull in his muscles then, take his high commissioner home, and call it a day. He's promised. Mr. Quezon—he says—intends to hold us to that promise.

And the boogie-men of the Pacific are waiting to close in on that day.

Yet during the month in which these words are read—November—the Nacionalistas are endeavoring to re-elect President Manuel Quezon and Vice President Sergio Os-



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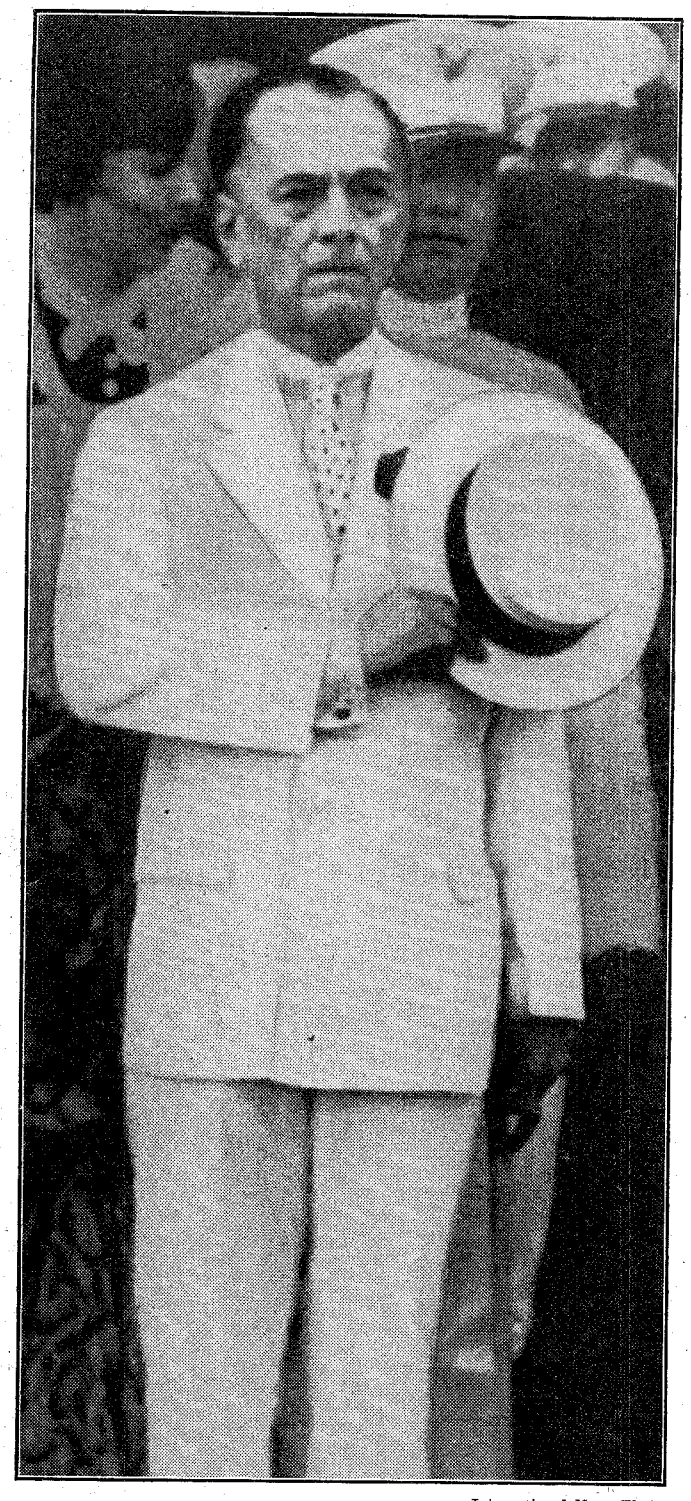

International News Photo

President Manuel Quezon. Is his demand for independence a bluff?

mena, on a platform reaffirming their undying insistence on Philippine independence in 1946.

That is to say, they are apparently bent on that process of cutting their own throats; apparently afraid that America is on the verge of breaking its promise, and putting the imperialistic clamps back on our little adopted cousins.

How come? Why the lust for self-slaughter?

The answer is simple. Mr. Quezon has made a career of demanding independence: which, if you ask me, is something the Islands never had and probably never will have the least bit of use for. But he is a politician, and a good one.

Now every politico needs a cause; and the man in the street, or the man in the *padi* field—the *tao*, as they call the Philippine Joe Doakes—interprets independence as a happy business wherein all taxes are abolished, where no one has to work, where the government reimburses you for all money lost betting on cockfights? with band concerts, fiestas, and factory-made shoes falling from heaven. And who would not want that?

The brilliant Mr. Quezon would not. As long as there is no independence, he is the staunch supporter of liberty, and the *tao* is behind him, voting. Mr. Quezon knows that once Uncle Sam moved out, the Islands wouldn't enjoy independence long enough to finish the celebration.

For the head-hunters are ready to blow the islands apart, and the Japanese are waiting to pick up the pieces. As follows:

WAY DOWN south in Mindanao, the second largest island of the group, there is a district and a town called Davao, colonized by a good part of the thirty thousand Japanese who inhabit the islands. They got there by all manner of immigration frauds, and no one could dope out a peaceful way of sending them home.

Any outsiders, including Americans, who want to enjoy the beauties of Davao Bay, first get permission from the Japanese consul at Manila. This of course is not legally or officially the case; but in effect, you have to get a Japanese visa to visit a town that is still under the American flag.

Otherwise, a mosquito might bite you, or your tea would upset your stomach. You'd just not come back with your pictures of the vast hemp plantations.

Maybe the Japanese are planting more than hemp. Davao Bay would make a swell supply base if the Imperial Navy wanted to operate against the Dutch East Indies, for it is only a short run to the Balikpapan oil fields of Borneo. Davao, town and hinterland, is a handy place for honest hemp-growers to do squads right of an evening, and to drill with muskets that need not necessarily be made of wood.

And the only thing that has kept that Japanese from pushing the natives into the Sulu and other seas has been the Stars and Stripes.

Then, down in Mindanao and points south, there is a wiry little fighting man called the Moro: a fanatic Moslem who for three bloody centuries whipped the Spaniards, using nothing but insane valor and a wavy-bladed *kris*, or a *kampilan* with a two-foot blade. And Moro pirates sailed six hundred miles north to Manila, carrying war into the camp of the Spanish invader.

When the United States took over, the Moro was a problem child who, for sheer cussedness, valor, and ability to soak up punishment, beat anything our army ever faced. And once Uncle Sam hauls down the colors, the men of Mindanao and Sulu will live up to their thousand-year-old tradition of being the toughest that sail the sea or sneak through the jungle. They hate the Christian Filipino, and it is mutual.

For these Moros have a fascinating old ritual called the Juramentado. The idea is to cleanse one's self thoroughly, dress up in a white sarong, take a good sharp *kris* in hand, and go out looking for Christians. You start in wherever you find them, carving up Christians until somebody kills you; then you go to heaven on a white horse, escorted by the demised Christians (who are now your slaves); and you come to rest in gardens filled with beautiful maidens.

And this is still going on. Within the last four years, upward of a hundred Philippine Christians have been decapitated or otherwise done in by these unreconstructed Moslems.

There is reason to believe that the Moros are now being aroused by more than hopes of Paradise; specifically, that

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the Japanese in the Islands are telling them that the Filipinos are not their friends, that the Americans are insincere, and that only from the sons of Nippon will they get a square meal.

This is a very indigestible element for the body politic, come independence; and Mr. Quezon is quite aware of it.

Not that the Christian Filipino isn't a good fighting man himself; Philippine Scout troops, led by American officers, fought and finally disarmed the Moro. With American troops, they slashed and blasted it out in bloody stands at Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak—where the Moro, though wiped out, won more glory than the victors.

And the Moslems are going to look for retribution once the Americano leaves. It is not a bad risk to bet that Moro prahus would sail again for every isolated settlement, perhaps even to Manila, on or shortly after the day of liberation.

BUT, while the Moro is bad—while he is five to one a better fighting man than any Japanese ever dreamed of being—the Japanese are the real menace. They have the discipline that no Moro has or ever will have; they have also ships and planes and all the industrial development that is needed for "peacefully" penetrating a rich country.

The Islands have no petroleum, but there is hemp, tobacco, sugar, and gold; up in Benguet is one of the richest gold deposits in the world. And Manila Bay is fifteen hundred

International News Photo

Native soldiers, trained by the U. S. Army. But there aren't enough of them

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International News Photo

Savage, unquelled, the Moros hate the Christian Filipinos, and it's mutual

miles closer to Singapore and the Dutch East Indies than Japan's southermost port: another valuable feature in a campaign to give Asia to the Asiatics.

How about the Philippine Regular Army of four thousand officers and men, and the 132,00 trained reserves, organized in thirteen divisions? How about the fortified island of Corregidor, guarding the mouth of Manila Bay—a fine harbor thirty miles from mouth to mainland, and big enough to shelter the largest battle fleet?

The Scouts, now the basis of the Commonwealth's army, are first-class fighting men; ask any American officer who commanded them in the field, against their hard-bitten cousins, the Moros. In a whole company of these veterans, it is hard to find one who doesn't wear at least a sharpshooter's badge and most of them hold the higher grade of expert.

The Filipinos are beyond any doubt the best marksmen in all Asia, and could make a fool of any but a few picked European regiments. The Japanese, on the other hand, are among the worst.

There is a Philippine military academy, patterned after our West Point, even to such deails as that murderously uncomfortable full dress uniform. The students of the Central Luzon Agricultural School get their daily military drill. And many officers of the Philippine army are West Point graduates: smart, business-like chaps who made the grade at a place which washes out fifty percent of the American candidates in the first six months of the plebe year.

Finally, there is Douglas MacArthur, for five years field marshal of the Philippines, and now Lieutenant-General, U. S. Army. In World War Number One MacArthur was a brigadier at the age of thirty-eight; the boy general, they called him. It was said that he was reprimanded for personally leading his men, going out in front, instead of staying behind the lines, as men with one or more stars on the shoulder are supposed to do.

A dozen years ago, he commanded the Philippine Department; later, he was Chief of Staff, U. S. Army. Among a bushel basket of decorations, foreign and domestic, he won the Oak Leaf of the Distinguished Service Cross, and seven Silver Star Citations for personal gallantry. And he's the son of Arthur MacArthur, who distinguished himself in the Islands in Spanish-American War days.

I remember him when he was superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point: the rakish cap, the non-regulation topcoat, the "sea going" boots, the jaunty stride of a general who went out in front. And we who found little to commend in any superintendent approved of MacArthur. Since then, he has proven his valor and his competence; and what is more, he knows the Philippines and their problems.

WELL, then: with the impregnable fortress of Corregidor, with a nucleus of hard-fighting Scouts, a rapidly growing new army, and a commander-in-chief who has spent quite a few of the past twenty years in the Islands, where does the Japanese menace come in?

It's just this: defending Manila is one of the most impossible military jobs that could be assigned any man, or any army. And Manila *is* the Philippines; take Manila, the brain of the archipelago, and all you have left is some seven thousand islands, which, aside from cultivated areas, are mountain and jungle. These can be gobbled up piecemeal, with only guerilla warfare to make it hot for the invaders.

Not that guerillas are to be ignored; far from it. However, military occupation by Japan would pacify the freelance warriors as quickly as the United States occupation did. The sprawling islands, inhabited by dozens of tribes, isolated from each other and speaking dozens of different languages and dialects, have no unity. The Philippines are not a nation; the national idea exists only in the few towns, in the minds of the *taos* not too far from Manila. And mainly it exists as a slogan for Mr. Quezon.

Highways and railways are practically non-existent; and without communications there is no such thing as national unity. Thus, island by island, the archipelago could be taken over, once the Manila area was out of action.

No; the Imperial Navy could not steam past Corregidor; the job is not quite so simple. Neither could their planes drop enough bombs to make an impression on an island

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which for the past thirty years has bit by bit been converted into a solid mass of concrete from which mines radiate in every direction; from whose casemates heavy guns command both sea and bay. Yet, there is an answer—

Just ignore Corregidor. Land troop transports at Lingayan Bay, near the railhead at Dagupan. From there it's a short run to Manila. Or, south of the big city, land at Batangas. Both spots are way beyond the range of Corregidor's great guns. And the Philippine army, regardless of the individuals' proven valor, could not do much about it: because there is not enough army, and not enough air force, and not enough artillery.

Planes from carriers, lying well beyond Corregidor, could by-pass the anti-aircraft of the fortress and swoop in, dumping their sticks into Manila. Blackouts would do nothing but save electricity: for Manila is outlined by water, which has plenty of visibility at night. The Pasig River, flowing from Fort McKinley, out in Rizal, winds through Manila and clearly spots every important quarter; and its mouth completes the job by dividing the bay front.

Nor could the city stand a bombing. Aside from Malacañan Palace, Fort Santiago, and a few modern buildings, Manila is as flimsy as any of Japan's paper cities. An appropriation of half a million dollars was made last summer for building shelters; but they'll have to be above ground. Dig below three feet in swampy Manila and you strike water.

When the planes come over, there is just one thing to do: get out, and in a hurry. Unhappily, the sprawling city is so hemmed in by water and jungle, and served by so few highways that evacuation plans do not look very good even on paper.

Unless Uncle Sam has secretly prepared an aerial surprise, there are not anywhere near enough planes to defend Manila. And doggedly holding impregnable Corregidor while the invaders took possession and kept the city would be profitless; there wouldn't even be prestige in it!

More roads, more guns, more planes—and a navy: that is what the Philippines need to block any serious Japanese attempt to take over. Without that, General MacArthur and his hard-fighting troops would buck a losing game, outnumbered on land, and overwhelmed from the air.

THE TRUTH of the matter is, Uncle Sam's navy is the threat that has prevented an open invasion of the Islands; not just the Asiatic Squadron, which does not carry enough weight for the job, but the entire Pacific Fleet. That unbeaten navy, most of it based on Honolulu —though Guam and other outlying islands have contributed to Nipponese caution—is the answer.

Manila, though defenseless, is still the stumbling block to Japanese seizure of the priceless Dutch East Indies: a prize far more valuable than the Philippines. The first move to take the Indies, whether based on Japan or the Asiatic Coast, could be broken up by the Pacific fleet, steaming westward and, using Corregidor as a base, separating the Imperial Navy from its island empire.

The Dutch East Indies are no pushover; they have infinitely more transportation, aerial protection, and naval forces than the Philippine Commonwealth. They could be attacked by surprise, but not taken into camp before our Pacific Fleet steamed in to protect our rubber and tin supply.

More than that: the Indies control the route from Australia to Singapore, India, Britain. Committed as we are to backing John Bull to win, we have another reason for keeping an eye on Manila.

And why? Simply because, as long as the Indies are being eyed by a nation which needs their wealth of oil, tin, and rubber, the Philippines are valuable as a base.

But note this: the Philippines, in spite of their natural resources, are not worth a *war* to Japan. To take them as the first move in a seizure of Borneo, Java, Celebes, and Sumatra would make a naval clash with the United States certain; whereas going directly to the Indies could make that clash only probable, with at least a chance of apologies, explanations, of getting concessions or unlimited trade rights as the price of retreat.

And that is the Japanese trick; that is what is under way in the Islands now. Consider Davao, with the thousands of Japanese squatters everyone tactfully ignores, in spite of the fact that their presence is virtually an invasion and an usurpation of sovereignity.

The Philippine government's feeble protests ended before they fairly started. The only active objection came from the Manobos and Bagobos of the unexplored hinterland. Just to keep their hands in, they sharpen up *kris* and *barong* and come down out of the hills to massacre hemp planters.

The Japanese are in Davao, and they are there to stay; the same gag could work in the Dutch East Indies.

The people of Manila are convinced that Japan will not attack the Islands; and the way everything adds up, the man on the street is pretty nearly right. But if the Stars and Stripes were ever hauled down, he would be dead wrong. Before he had a chance to ask what the shooting was about, he'd be getting a compulsory lesson in how to say *banzai.*

In a few years—perhaps five or ten, if earnestly devoted to building battleships, planes, motorized artillery and every other kind of artillery—the Philippine army and the navy-to-be might defend the largest of the many islands; though it still is not clear who would pay for all this.

It is a cinch that the Islands—wholly agricultural except for a few sugar mills and other enterprises not adapted to defense manufactures—could not dig up the *pesos;* not even the Benguet gold mines could pay the bill.

No; Uncle Sam's industrial setup, and Uncle Sam's navy are what have kept the Yellow Menace from blotting out the Little Brown Brother—which is something Mr. Quezon never mentions in his campaign speeches.

Let Freedom ring—if any!

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Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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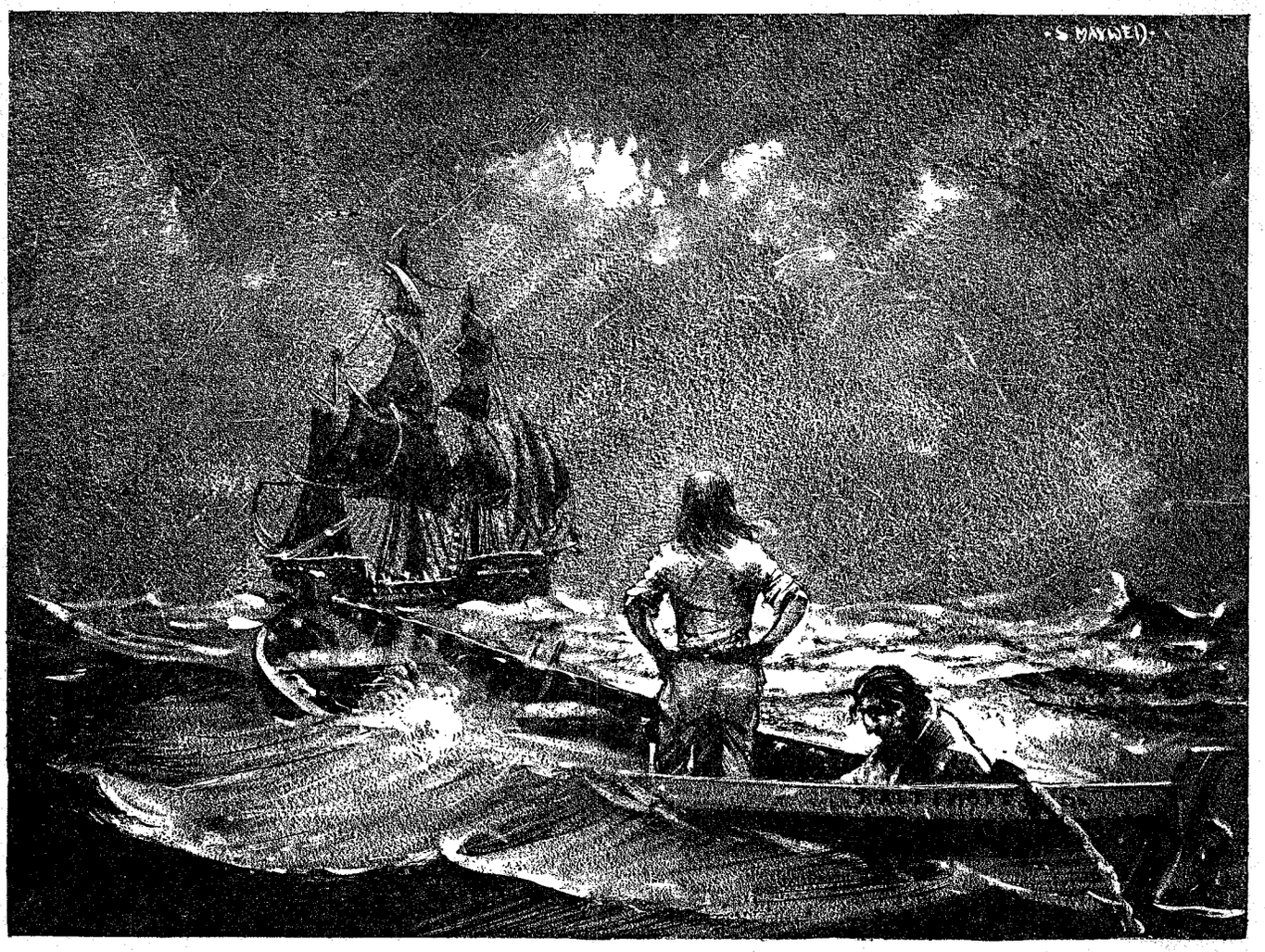

Cap'n Spry

'Twas 1813, and the high seas were rich with booty and jeopardy. But one privateersman collected only the jeopardy—until his Jonah manned the guns

By Robert A. Nicolls

I

CAPTAIN JEREMY SPRY'S mouth formed in a curse as he sought to hold his glass true on the waterlogged shell of the open boat careening in the tumultuous seas a half mile to leeward. She wasn't, he saw, going to last very long—maybe not long enough for him to help—and there were people aboard.

Someone lay like a flung sack of meal in the stern, but the figure crouched in the bow raised its head now and then to peer with a sort of agonized rigidity at the oncoming ship. A sea anchor of sorts kept the half-filled cockleshell headed into the wind; she floundered, tossed, disappeared in the troughs, and was flung helplessly high on the crests like a partly squashed waterbug.

Under the youthful captain's feet the deck boards of the *Young Republic* lurched sickeningly as the privateer pitched to the aftermath of the hurricane's might. Bad luck ship or not, his fine fast brig had weathered the blow like the stout-ribbed lass she was. He swept a quick glance forward over the ordered breechings of the black guns, the deck already cleared of wreckage, the splintered foremast, spliced and stayed, holding up well under the strain of swelling canvas.

For a moment elation overcame his gloom. The sun trailing red-gold streamers across the western sky betokened a spell of fine weather to come. Luck would surely change now; surely they'd find a prize. They'd *have* to find a prize! Three months out of Scituate, food bad, water turning, crew near to mutiny. The elation died. He was conscious of the dry, hard cough at his elbow and turned to glare as the bantam-cock figure of his first mate swung into place beside him.

Uncle Eb'n Tilden coughed again, worked his lean jaws savagely on his cud and jerked a thumb at the foundering little hulk.

"Huh!" The cracked contempt in the old man's voice was venomous. "A ship's boat! We sure pick the prizes!" He spat expertly over the lee rail and wiped brown juice from his mouth. "Women aboard a fightin' ship! Jonahed, by gum!"

Jeremy clapped his glass to his eye again and turned away to hide his rage and misery. Women aboard a fighting ship. God blast 'em all—crew and officers alike—for a pack of superstitious fools! To believe that a picture—a picture of his Betsey . . . Yet from the day he'd hung it in the after cabin not a man but had sworn it a bad-luck charm. He snorted grimly, jerked a hand.

"Mr. Everett!"

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"Sir?" The second mate came on the run.

"See to getting fenders rigged. We'll sail 'em down!" It was futile to risk the longboat in seas like this.

"Aye aye!"

They came downwind fast—eased off. It was a ship's jolly boat, the captain saw. She rose in the next wave crest so sluggishly he wondered how she stayed afloat. The figure in the bow had lugged the inert body of his comrade forward and was crouched there again cradling the still form in his arms. His features showed white and desperate as he peered up at the heads lining the *Republic's* bulwarks. The brig's bow fell off.

"Now!"

There was a swift deft sweep of boathooks, and men swinging overside to hoist the still, unconscious figure to the deck as his companion swarmed unaided up a thrown line with the catlike grace of a good seaman.

"Bring her up!" Jeremy felt the spirited quiver of the hull even as he roared his order—saw the empty sodden wreck collapse under the next towering crest as the ship fell away, gathering speed. He was so intent watching the strain on the damaged foremast that the first mate's sudden grunt startled him.

"Lord God," snorted Eb'n Tilden aloud, "another woman!"

Jeremy blinked.

SHE wasn't much to look at. She wore wide, canvas seaman's pantaloons cut down to fit her, as dirtied and sodden as her blue blouse. Jeremy's mouth corners curled in a ghost of a grin at thought of a girl in a get-up like that; but the grin faded when men lugged the form of the other castaway toward him.

The man was done. The blue pinched look about mouth and eyes wasn't only from exposure; his arm and side were a crushed, pulpy mess. When they tried to cut shirt and jacket free of the hurts he fought them off feebly.

"No use . . . fallin' spar . . . swiped me!" He gulped the rum they held to his lips and gasped for breath. "Cap'n Robert Drew, schooner *Spray* . . . four guns . . . Balt'more. Dismasted two days back!" His breathing came in a rattling wheeze.

"Crew washed overboard . . . sinking . . . launched jolly boat—" He twisted his head in a desperate effort to peer up at the girl. "You Anne," he said. His eyes rolled suddenly back.

"Paw!" Her voice was edged with terror. "Paw!" She didn't cry. Her mouth quivered, but she fought it, steadied it, and looked from wide gray eyes into Jeremy's blue ones. "I guess," she said at last, "I guess I'll have to ship with you, Cap'n—"

"Spry," said Jeremy. The mutter of the crew held an ominous growling undertone, capped by a bleak snort from Eb'n Tilden. The hurt terror in the girl's look, the strained fatigue in the white, sea-wet features, her instinctive movement toward his side, filled him with sudden pity.

He jutted out his lean jaw, swept the glowering ring of faces with an icy stare. His voice was a snarl, "Get back to your duties!" Grimly he watched the sullen backs move down the deck. He squared his straight shoulders, breathed deep to ease the pound of his heart, knowing he'd averted mutiny by an eyelash. A *live* woman this time! Soon now he'd have to face the final showdown.

"Mr. Tilden, take over! Hold your course!" He turned to the girl. "Come aft to the cabin, you'll need dry clothes!" He didn't mean the gruffness of voice, and the flash of hopeless bitterness in her eyes hurt him. He could only rake dry apparel of his own from a locker and leave her without further words.

When she finally reappeared it was almost dusk. In the high-running seas the hove-to *Republic* pitched and reared like an unbroken colt and the crew grabbed handholds as they assembled in the waist.

"Uncover!"

Over the bowed heads Jeremy's voice carried grave and clear: "Into Thy hands O Lord we commit this body to the Deep." Four stalwarts tipped one end of the long plank over the bulwark; three twelve-pounder balls took the canvas-lashed bundle that had been Cap'n Robert Drew swiftly out of sight into the green depths. The girl's eyes widened at the splash, but aside from a quivering mouth corner she wouldn't give way to emotion.

AT DINNER time exhaustion and hot rum had left her in a stupor of sleep, snugged under blankets in the cubby hole where the captain normally bunked.

Jeremy pushed away his plate untouched. The food stank—condemned naval stores. And as a cook Ezekiel Sykes only made it worse! Jeremy'd beggared himself to outfit his ship, and Aunt Freelove Pierce would be hard put when the notes fell due on the mortgaged farms. Deep in his heart and against his will he knew he was nearing the end. He shot a surreptitious glance at the oval of Betsy's picture on the farther wall, then quickly lowered his eyes. He'd caught Eb'n Tilden's look.

"Women!" The little mate snorted through a mouthful of salt horse and hard tack.

Jeremy flushed. Here was the trouble with shipping as first officer a man who'd bounced you on his knee as a child. At times like this you were friend and friend, not captain and subordinate. It was bad for discipline. His scowl deepened.

Eb'n squinted. "Ye're low," he said. "An' I know why!" He jabbed a skinny forefinger at the miniature. "You brung her aboard an' hung her up! That's the fust bad luck. Second—she seen ye off from the deck with young Tom Driscoll's arm about her waist. Son o' the richest man in town, an' she a-oglin' him. Yup! I've knowed her since she was a pup—jes' like I've knowed you—an' she ain't the kind o' craft *I'd* like the handlin' of, blow high blow low!"

The tart truth of the words made the captain set his teeth. Betsey had been the reason for this venture, and Betsey had proved a weak reed. Captain Jeremy Spry, successful privateersman! Money and fame to match the lure of the Driscoll fortune. Bah! The ornate flourish of the lettering and the red wax of the commission's seals seemed to mock him from the depths of the maple frame.

BE IT KNOWN . . . pursuance . . . Act of Congress, this sixteenth day of March, one thousand eight hundred and thirteen . . . and etc. . . . do commission the private armed BRIG,* Young Republic, *mounting eight short-carriage guns and one Long Tom twelve pounder . . . town of Scituate, MASSACHUSSETTS . . . Jeremy Spry, owner and captain . . . to attack, subdue and take all ships belonging to the inhabitants of Great Britain and dominions, both armed and unarmed . . . and etc. . . .

To attack, subdue and take all ships! Lord above, where *were* they? He felt Eb'n's keen eyes studying him.

"What ye gonna do with this new gal?" The mate jerked a thumb at the farther door.

"Do? What the tarnation *can* I do?

"Set her ashore at the nearest port!"

Jeremy thrust out his jaw. She was homeless, penniless, alone. He remembered her instinctive move toward him, and the sickening hurt in her eyes. He reckoned she must hate him, but he was damned if he'd throw her hapless ashore as a sop to superstition.

"I'll see you all in hell first," he said grimly.

"All right," said his first mate amiably, "but ye'll face a real mutiny ef she stays."

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II

IT WAS the second morning she'd been aboard that he noted the vague uneasiness among the crew as he began his inspection tour. There was muttered talk behind his back, he felt their eyes watching him. Mutiny? And suddenly he saw where the quick sly glances focused.

Smoke poured in a sooty stream from the galley chimney, and breakfast over, an hour ago! That cook! smudging fresh holystoned decks. Ezekiel Sykes had had this coming a long while. Captain Spry made the galley door in a dozen furious strides, and as he hesitated, hand to latch, the greasy Ezekiel popped suddenly out into his arms.

"Why you—" The cook's teeth rattled as the enraged captain shook him. "Dirty my decks, eh—waste good fuel!"

Ezekiel Sykes appeared slightly dazed. "No sir," he said, and stuttered, "t-tain't me!" His eyes rolled. "She —" he hesitated, "she jes' come down here an' started givin' orders. I bin bilin' water since breakfas'. Such a steamin' an' scrubbin' you never seen. Said the galley looked like a pigsty." He shook his head vaguely and gulped. "A pig sty," he repeated. He broke free of the clutching hands and scurried away like a hunted rabbit to draw more water from the butts. Jeremy looked inside.

In a steamy swirl, hedged by ordered rows of fresh scrubbed pots, Anne Drew looked suddenly up and saw him. She peered belligerently into his eyes through the clouds of steam.

"You leave me be!" she cried fiercely. "You go about your work an' tend your ship. I aim to pay my passage the only way I can. Now you get out!" The threatening motion of the long-handled mop she wielded made him retire precipitately. No use to squabble with this irate girl. Besides if she wanted to take over Syke's job it was all right with him. He went aft angered that the men had witnessed his retreat.

At noon, to his amazement, the crew squatted around the mess tarpaulins spread on deck and scraped the food pots clean. For the first time since the voyage began the mess kits were returned to the galley to be refilled. Still smarting, he remained obstinately on deck, munched two weevily biscuits with small appetite and affected not to notice the satisfied demeanor of his officers when they rejoined him. Mr. Everett relieved an obvious discomfort at the waistline by the loosening of two belt notches. The crochety lines in Eb'n Tilden's face appeared decidedly softened and he used a whittled splinter to pick his teeth with manifest relish.

By dinner time the captain's urgent stomach forced him to capitulation. Cheery lamplight flicked the gold in Anne Drew's hair as she placed cutlery on a cloth he noted was for once stainless. In spite of the dreadful handicap of a clean shirt Ezekiel Sykes stepped like a well trained animated scarecrow. His lank locks bore the marks of a comb. The girl whisked a napkin from a heaped platter.

"Hey?" yelped Eb'n. His voice squawked like a surprised rooster's. "*Biscuits?* Hairs off a sea serpent's tail! Biscuits—fresh baked!"

They ate. Tarnation! Jeremy passed his plate a second time, ignoring Eb'n Tilden's obvious wink. Scurrying between cabin and galley, Ezekiel Sykes was in a state of near collapse before the repleted men sat back. Eb'n Tilden boomed a stentorian belch, forthright and unashamed; he looked the silent girl over with a spry bright eye. "Ma'm," he said, "ye kin cook! Them biscuits!"

She merely smiled at him vaguely. "We make 'em that way down Maryland. Takes a heap of beating, but it's worth it sometimes!" She had no real glance for him; she was looking breathlessly at Jeremy. Her cheeks were flushed in the lantern glow.

Stubbornly he refused to look at her. Good food or not he was blamed if he'd let her make amends for standing him down that morning before his whole crew. With an obvious clatter of reaching down his telescope he hurried out on deck and in the last dim light peered despairingly for a sail.

Yet within the hour the men had sent a respectful delegation aft requesting that Miss Drew be allowed to take full charge of cooking duties. Tight-lipped but relieved, he gave assent. In the darkness there was spirited movement along the decks. The first good-humored laughter in weeks floated up to his ears. Somewhere amidships an unseen group broke into a chanty.

"SAIL ho-o-o-o! Two points the port bow!" the lookout's voice drifted down from aloft. Silhouetted blackly, high in the masthead against the rising sun, his arm pointed across the sparkling wave crests toward the horizon.

Before the *Republic's* bow had finished swinging to the southeast, gunners were already checking their pieces. By the time the crew had been piped to breakfast the racing privateer had gotten the stranger's topsails in sight from the deck. By midmorning she was hull up and trying to run for it—big and brig-rigged—and in spite of tall spars being outfooted two to one.

Jeremy's palms were slippery as he gripped his glass. The chase rode low, and he counted her inventory mentally to himself, running his tongue briefly over dry lips. This was the one—yep, this was the one. Scituate, I'm coming! This is the time we rip that crazy superstition plumb to shreds. Picture, we'll make a passel of liars out of 'em all; we'll show 'em you're my good-luck charm. He lowered his glass.

"What'd'ye make of her?"

Eb'n Tilden squinted through his telescope. "Dunno." A vague disquiet tinged his tone. "Seems a mite trim. Don't show no colours neither!"

Blood pounded hard in Jeremy's ears. "Hell! We sight the first real ship all cruise an' you don't like her looks! I say she's made to order!" His anger rose; the awful thought of failure rode him. "She's runnin' ain't she? Yonder's a prize! You afraid to smell powder?" His accusing glare took in Anne Drew as though he held her in some way responsible for the hesitation of his chief officer. She had no business on deck at a time like this. His voice shook as he swung toward her.

"Get below and stay below until you're called on deck, or by the Lord I'll have you clapped in irons!"

"Will you fight?" Nostrils flaring he turned to Uncle Eb'n. "Or shall I have Mr. Everett take over?"

Eb'n Tilden returned the glance squarely. There was no hate in it—merely a sort of pity mixed with understanding. "Tain't the fust time I've smelled powder." He shifted his quid. "Recollect 'twas a time ye used to pester me continual like to see some splinter scars. Ye was about so high then." He measured a space above the deck with the palm of a calloused hand. He didn't look up.

"What's orders, Cap'n Spry?"

"Beat to quarters! Cast loose an' provide! Yonder's no American rig!"

The first mate touched his hat without a word, turned and walked forward. A minute later the drums began their long roll.

They came up fast. The sky was clean and fair with a steady breeze; a seaman couldn't ask for better fighting weather. The high bulwarks of the fleeing ship hid all movement on her decks; her sides looked dirty and rust streaked under the billowing pile of canvas. Behind their gun ports the men of the *Republic* crouched in orderly groups around the squat black carronades.

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She faced those sullen, mutinous men, and her biting words shamed them

Thin blue smoke spirals swirled from the linstocks as the gunners swung them in slow circles to keep the tips aglow. Eb'n Tilden moved along from breech to breech, apelike and spry, checking the vents in a silence so still the rush of the cutwater sounded loud above the creaking monotone of ship's noises.

Mr. Everett coughed dryly. "Comin' up awful fast on a ship with spars like hers."

"Bah!" Jeremy snorted. "Can't you see them scaly sides? Been at sea so long she's got a regular forest on her bottom. We got her legs, that's all!"

"What's the range—a mile?"

"Nigher three quarters." The second mate squinted. "Yup, just about."

"We'll try the Long Tom. Tell Mr. Tilden!"

"Aye aye!"

The thin squeal of tackle drifted aft; the long muzzle slewed to bear on the chase as the gun crew leaped into action. The rammer twirled and plunged, and beyond the thin figure of Mr. Everett striding back, Jeremy saw the crouched form of his first mate resetting the elevation quoins himself. Then Eb'n Tilden jumped aside and all in a motion the gunner slapped his lighted linstock down.

The orange-red stab of flame lashed out, the smashing roar of the long gun pounded Jeremy's ear drums hard, and then they were plunging through the wind-shredded smoke of the discharge as he peered to get a better view of the shot.

"Over an' ahead!"

He didn't need Mr. Everett's high-pitched shout to see the white column mushroom suddenly up on the distant wave crest and collapse. Forward the tackles squealed again; the sponger drove his sopping wad far down the smoking throat of the piece as the straining men labored to run it back into battery.

"Cap'n Spry!" His second's hand joggled his elbow. "Them rust streaks on her side! Don't look natchel somehow! You take a look!" He had clamped his telescope to eye again as he spoke. "Oh my God!"

The quarry's topsails shivered raggedly as they spilled the wind, and she spun.

"It's paint! She's streaked to hide her ports!"

But Jeremy couldn't answer. The ports had dropped in her discolored sides with the precision of a single unit, and beyond her protruding black guns he could see the ordered groups of blue-shirted crews. A ball of bunting swept jerkily up to the stranger's peak; the wind whipped it, flung the folds tree.

"The Union Jack!"

The ten ports seemed to leer as the corvette's broadside bore at them. "Stand by to go about!" But even as he roared the order Jeremy's flesh was quivering. Those guns'd be served by long-term fighting crews. Long twelves—eighteens even—that'd smash up the *Republic's* short-range carronades before they'd have a chance to fire.

III

THE corvette's broadside crashed as the *Republic* swung; the windy, lurching whine of the shot passed close. A twelve-pound ball drenched the quarterdeck with spray, and a flying ricochet hulled them aft. Then the British warship's bow went up. With a bone in her teeth and every yard of canvas set, she stood in pursuit of the fleeing privateer!

Cursing, Jeremy watched her come. Damn 'em, they'd tricked him like a stupid greenhorn; and what was worse she was going to be hard to shake. To his startled gaze she seemed to have yardage of a line-of-battle ship—sail on sail piled high and swelling in the wind.

For an hour the *Republic* held her own; then the wind shifted. Eb'n Tilden lowered his glass with studied carelessness.

"She's a gainin'," he observed matter-of-factly. "Ought to be barkin' right soon now."

He had hardly spoken when the quick red flash licked from the white cloud of smoke at the corvette's bow. An

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instant later a geyser sprang suddenly up from the crests fifty yards astern.

"Short." Jeremy spoke as though to himself.

Uncle Eb'n's lean jaws worked a trifle faster on his cud. "Not by much!"

The chase gun fired again. They could all hear the ball coming. Unable to turn, the helmsman hunched his shoulders high at the sound, with eyes set in a fixed stare at the fill of the canvas up above. He looked as if he might be praying. All in an instant a round hole opened miraculously in the taut mainsheet overhead.

"Mr. Everett!"

"Sir?"

"Have the crew rig bucket lines. Wet your sails!"

Men swung aloft, heedless of the balls that whined and ricochetted from crest to crest. The sloshing water began to take effect on the straining canvas—closing the seams, cupping and holding every precious particle of driving gust to aid the driving hull. The next shots dropped astern. Jeremy's throat was hard put to wrench out the words.

"We're leaving him!"

"Aye," said Eb'n Tilden; his beady eye squinted. "But he's usin' our trick!"

Their glasses showed the splash of water high in the other's spars, silvery flashes in the sun. When the chase gun finally fired again the shot splashed a cascade of spray over the starboard bulwarks.

Jeremy nodded at his first mate's unspoken query and set his jaw as his eyes swept the breechings of the main battery. New guns too! It was no use—they'd have to go to lighten ship. Prizes! Pictures! Women! He reckoned the crew had been right after all.

"Start 'em going! Cut loose the anchors—empty all shot lockers. But leave the Long Tom be." By the Eternal, he'd still save something to make a fight of it in case the corvette closed. He kept his glance steadfastly on the pursuing ship so he wouldn't see his cherished guns go overboard; yet he couldn't shut out the sound of the ax blows on the bulwarks, nor the mighty splashes that followed, one upon another.

The *Republic* responded immediately to her lightened load with a buoyant quickening of her stride that left the next shots plunging short; and even Eb'n Tilden's sour features broke into a relieved grin as he came aft, wrapping a brace of mangled fingertips in a dirtied rag. But the Britisher refused to quit. Piling sail on sail, he hung to their wake like a cockleburr. Two hours later he began to gain again.

Glass to eye for the hundredth time, palms clammy with sweat, the captain was forced at last to agree with the dry finality in Eb'n Tilden's cough. Dusk fell before they noticed it. Creeping up, her riding lights showing through the gathering dark, the corvette could afford to bide her time. Night shut down with a rush.

Thank God there was no moon; but Jeremy snarled at the star-pricked heavens. Within the hour the British ship would be worked in close enough to have them plain under a night glass.

THE two mates followed him to the lee rail when he beckoned. The decks were engulfed in a silence so complete that the swish of waves sounded plain about the cutwater. Overhead the taut mainsheet loomed dimly white; the glow from the shaded binnacle light made a death's head mask of the helmsman's face.

The first mate seemed to read his captain's thoughts.

"Cap'n Spry! Eb'n Tilden jerked a thumb sternwards, "he'll be lookin' fer a dodge. Tack ship now an' we stand to lose ground. That corvette'll be watchin' every point o' the compass. Tackin'll probably put us in range of a night glass!" He shrugged and shivered. "Damnation! We wus jinxed from the beginnin'. *Two* women!"

A gasp made Jeremy turn. It was the girl come on deck again against his orders. Yet he managed to check the savage words that formed on his lips. The indistinct white blur of face, the sure knowledge of her terror swept him with quick pity. He swung again, sensing the intent query of his officers, knowing they were waiting impatiently for orders. Eb'n Tilden coughed; time was running short. But before he could speak the girl's low voice said, "Paw, he had a trick—" and then stopped suddenly as if afraid, the pale oval of her face swaying before them in the darkness. Yet when no one spoke in the hostile silence, she commenced again, the words coming with a breathless rush as if she felt she must get them out before she might be ordered below.

"Paw worked it last year—I was along!

"Cap'n Spry, you show a light above your stern rail. Drape a mite of canvas 'tween it and the ship's a-chasing you. Wind an' sea motion'll pop it in an' out behind the screen. Looks as if someone aboard's been careless!" Her hands made shadowy motions.

"Then you get your longboat overside, step her mast, hoist sail and lash the tiller. Let her run out by a line close astern!" The words came so precipitately they almost blurred. "Send a man into her with a covered light. When he sets it in her mast an' uncovers it, you douse your stern light same time!

"Paw worked it, I tell you!" Her breath made a fierce hissing sound. "Then cut the long boat loose an' let her run. Light in her mat'll swing in an' out behind her sail—just like behind your screen. Won't nobody aboard that corvette'll have an eye for aught beside that light. There's your chance to tack ship. Time they get close enough to see it's only a boat you'll be out of range of any night glass they got!" He voice broke suddenly. "I reckon," she whispered, "I reckon Maryland could show New England what real sailin' is if there was time!"

"Lord God!" squeaked Eb'n Tilden.

A great weight lifted from Jeremy's heart. "Mr. Tilden, rig that light! Mr. Everett, ready the long boat! Call up both watches! Stand by to tack ship!"

Ten minutes later the man from the longboat scrambled over the rail like a wet cat; one quick stroke of an ax parted the towline. The *Young Republic* heeled as the wheel went up.

"Look!" It might have been the bite of the wind that caused Mr. Everett's teeth to click. The corvette's running lights showed plain, but slowly, surely, the vague mass of her was looming through the lenses of their telescopes. Her sails showed as a dim white blob above the shadowy form creeping on across the black sea of their vision. Already a good half mile away, the lantern in the longboat rolled and dipped and danced in the murk. The hard little frame of the first mate quivered as a roll of the hull flung him against his captain.

"She—she ain't seen us! She ain't gonna follow us! Look, Jeremy, she's stayin' on her course; she's follerin' the longboat!"

With every stitch of canvas drawing the *Republic* raced to the eastward; the nebulous shadow of the corvette slid on with sinister slowness to merge once more with the somber night.

"Ho!"

A distant stab of quick red flame quivered the darkness toward the longboat's light, the boom of the gun reverberated sullenly. The lights were almost too distant now to see without a glass. The red flame stabbed the gloomy horizon again.

Jeremy turned. "Take charge, Mr. Tilden!" His glance had shown him the girl had disappeared. Bad luck

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or not, she'd saved their skins. In the darkness of the cabin he felt her shoulder heave under his clumsy touch.

"Anne," he said, "you Anne Drew!" But she struck at him with a hard little hand. "You go away an' leave me be. You go away!" Sobbing wrenched her as he stood wavering. He could sail and fight a ship with the best, but he couldn't understand women. He didn't know she really wanted him to stay. Baffled, he swung about and left.

IV

THEY RAN into fog later on that night and by dawn the the gray pall had placed a last chill touch on spirits already at their lowest ebb. The ax-splintered, empty gun ports seemed indecently naked. The *Republic's* bowsprit pointed north. It was Scituate now, right enough. Home to face the grins of the town; home to lose his cherished ship. Jeremy shivered under his oilskins. He was sorriest of all for old Aunt Freelove. Betsey? He reckoned rightly the Driscoll money would compensate Betsey—and surprisingly found he didn't care. His first mate fell into step beside him.

Eb'n Tilden cast aside formality; the grip on his captain's arm was roughly kind. "Jeremy," he said, "it can't be helped. They's hot coffee in the cabin. Git below fer a spell an' suckle a mug." His curled nostrils sniffed the dank air. "Fog'll be breakin' soon, I opine," and sounded more cheerful at thought of sun's warmth.

Stubbornly Jeremy shook his head. "We ain't licked yet! We still got the Long Tom. Eb'n—if we'd only meet a real prize!"

The mate grunted. "Doubt ye could get the crew to tackle a North River hay barge. We was Jonahed before even sailed. That picture fust, then this other gal!"

He shifted his quid and sighed briefly. "But by the Lord she *kin* cook!" It was his final effort to soften the harsh inclusion of her under the bad-luck charm.

When his captain answered him never a word he plodded away to his morning duties. The *Young Republic* plowed silently northwards.

Slowly the mist began to fade. Long streaming wraiths whirled higher as the dull gray brightened. Stretches of clear water opened in the solid banks ahead, sparkling mistily; and then seemingly all at once the dissolving curtain opened to the *Republic's* bows as they broke clear into open water that stretched to the horizon. The strong sunlight dazzled the eyes, flashing upward from the sea.

"Sail ho-o-o-o!" The lookout's voice was shrill with surprise. Mr. Everett yelped. "Look!" His jaw hung loosely as he shouted.

Three quarters of a mile away a ship ran on their starboard quarter. The red ensign of the British marine trailed from her peak; the heavy-bodied hull, the stubby spars stamped her plain as a carrier. Her rigging was alive with men working furiously to clap on sail.

Jeremy jumped for the rail, swung himself up, and clapped his glass to eye. "Beat to quarters! Mr. Tilden, ready a gun crew! Mr. Everett make all sail!"

The stranger dropped three ports and almost instantly let fly. The balls flew harmlessly overhead, and Jeremy's ear made quick and expert judgment of report and whine. Nine pounders only! Those three guns, too, were all the other had. The Long Tom would smash 'em up with ease. Then his ear caught the angry shoutings forward even as he swung about.

Fists flew in the milling group about the twelve-pounder. He saw Eb'n Tilden leap to the breech of the big gun—club a man sprawling into the scuppers with a pistol butt. It was mutiny—mutiny at a time like this! He grabbed a belaying pin as he raced across the deck.

His desperate rush cleared a path through the mob. The crew gave back silently, ominously, as their captain's raging glance swept the circle of faces.

"Well?"

Eb'n Tilden's bloodied mouth snarled. "They won't fight—refuse to load!"

Panting Jeremy glared at them. "Load that piece!"

But the gun crew still hung back. They shuffled their feet and lowered their eyes; the gun captain shook his head stubbornly.

"Cap'n Spry, this ship's Jonahed! Tain't our fault neither!" His tone was meaningful. A mutter of assent came from the crowd. "We can't take yonder ship with no lone twelve-pounder." His glance was half threatening, half apologetic. "You can't fight no bad luck charm, sir; you've seen yourself what's happened. Ef we make Scituate alive we're boundin' lucky!"

"YOU pack of yellow-livered cowards!" Before the bounding rush of the furious Anne Drew the circle fell suddenly back. Arms akimbo on slim hips, she faced them. Her storm blue eyes smoldered; rage merely enhanced the healthy richness of her cheeks; the mop of bobbed hair rippled yellow in the wind.

Why she's lovely, Jeremy thought; she's lovely!

The lash of her voice whip-cracked. "You milksops, no wonder a ship's Jonahed with the likes of you as crew! Plowing's all you're good for, you chicken-hearted farmers! *Farmers!*" She spat the word.

"I seen Paw take his first prize with a schooner so small she'd roll gunnels under when we fired her one gun. Bah! I tell you Maryland's got what you ain't got!" She raked them with contemptuous eyes. "That's guts!" she said.

"You still got a heavy gun! Fight it! Will you let a decent man lose his ship? Will you sneak home whipped? Can you hear your women laugh at you?"

Springing, she wrested the rammer from its wielder's hands and looked at Jeremy over the cannon's barrel. "Ain't the first time I've helped serve a gun!" The rammer twirled expertly in her fingers. "Cap'n Spry, I'll help to load if you'll tend breech an' vent! Let these chicken-hearted landsmen get below an' hide until we take that ship!"

"You give me back that rammer!" Furiously the gunner wrenched it from her grasp. "This ain't no woman's work!"

The corded veins in the gun-captain's face seemed about to burst. "Cap'n Spry, no woman's goin' to serve this gun. We'll fight! But send her below—send her below where she belongs!"

Men sprang to the gun. The tackles squealed. Jeremy turned. "You Anne!" He felt like a monster. Twice she'd saved his ship for him! He vowed he'd make it up to her when all this mess was done. "You Anne, go below!"

Tears glistened her eyes as she turned away, but he had no time to bother now with the pounding of his heart.

The muzzle of the twelve-pounder slewed, and its thunder crashed. Through the thinning smoke he saw the answering belch of the other's guns.

A few yards away the bulwarks dissolved suddenly into a fanning wave of splintered wood. The ripping shock that flamed through his chest and arm spun him back and down even as his startled eye saw the Long Tom lift high from its trunnions and grind its dismounted weight into the shattered body of its gunner. The men of the gun crew writhed on deck.

He stumbled, fought doggedly upright, wracked with pain, blood pouring warm across his skin. Panting he sagged against the capstan, pulled a pistol from his belt, covered the wavering men. "Remount that gun! Rig a tackle!" His icy glare held them. "I'll shoot the man who disobeys!"

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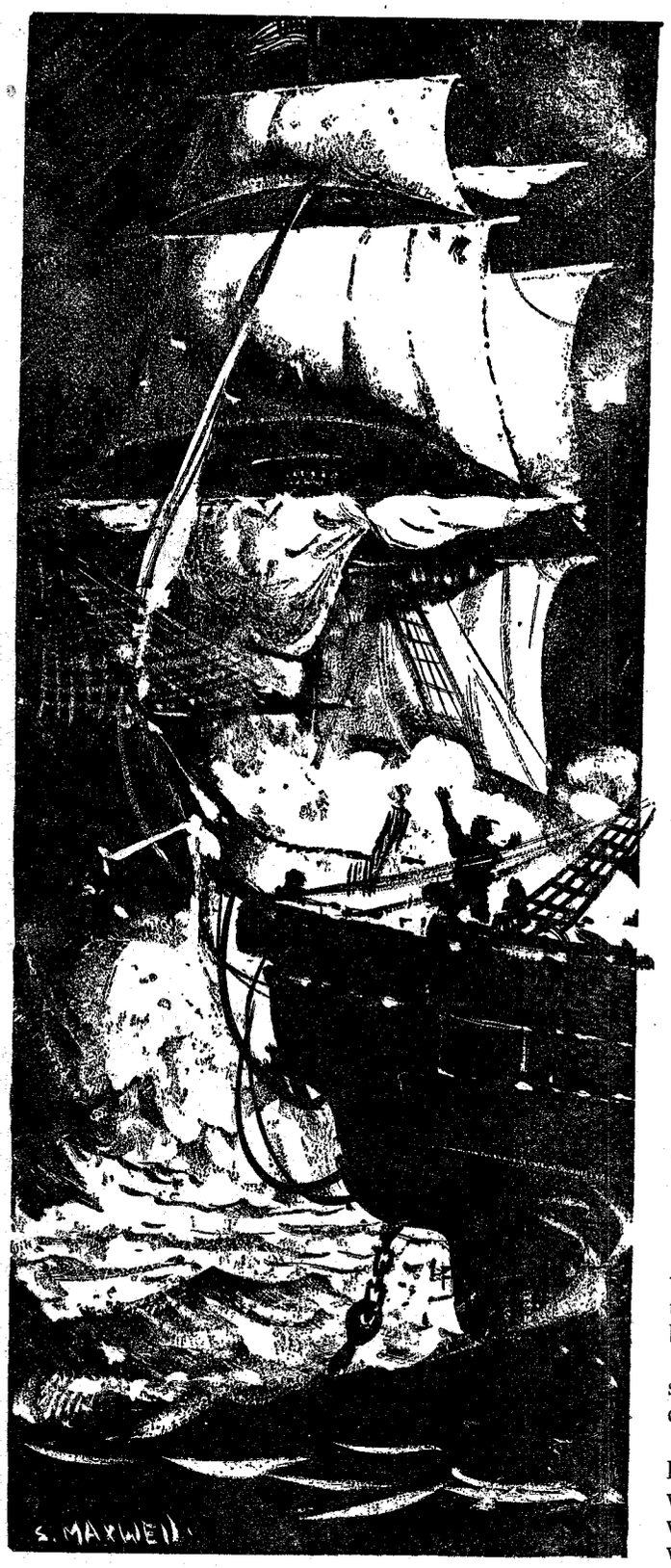

The twelve-pounders roared again as the two ships drew close

Eb'n Tilden leaped at them. "Rig that tackle—lively, blast you, lively!" Men hurled themselves into the work.

The agony bleared his eyes. But the gun was rising. Beyond, through the gaping bulwarks the hull of the chase loomed large under its straining pyramid of sail. The burbling whine of her shot passed close.

"Steady!" yelled Eb'n Tilden. "Steady does it, damn your eyes. She's almost set!"

THE TRUNNIONS of the poised twelve-pounder hung swaying over the empty sockets of the carriage. Nausea rose once more in Jeremy's chest. He closed his eyes, rolled his head despite the pain, and vomited, dimly sensing the shrill cheer, the rattle of loosened tackle. A splintering crash jarred the deck and distant screams served to focus his mind again. They'd been hit again aft; but the wonder of the Long Tom on its mounting riveted his gaze.

Teeth clamped on his tongue to stifle his moans, he crawled to the breech; he drove in the elevation quoins himself with his one good hand.

"Prime her!"

The gunner thrust the powder-filled goose quill down the vent. White smoke obscured the hull of the other ship, shot through with spurting tongues of flame. The *Republic* shivered under the impact of the hits—grimly, doggedly taking her punishment, and closing in.

"The linstocks!"

Where the sand-filled tub of smoking linstocks should have been lay only a mess of kindling wood, wet from the overturned sponging buckets in the ruins made by the overturned gun.

Jeremy snatched the pistol from his belt and snapped its pan over the cannon's vent. Again—again. The empty clickings mocked him.

"Get a light—get fire!" He shook his fist at the flying chase. "She'll knock a spar out of us in a minute and get away!"

The red tongues leaped from the quarry's sides, grape shot whined and pattered. A seaman sank coughing with a clogged wet sound that turned into a blubbery grunt as he collapsed. Close by, the gnarled little body of Eb'n Tilden twitched. From between his fingers clasped to his head a red stream trickled along the deck.

"Wait, Jeremy—set your sights!" The girl's light footsteps raced. Somewhere a door slammed. Crouched over the big breech, Jeremy muttered, eyes boring along the barrel. The footsteps came flying back again. With a smoking galley pan in her hands, Anne Drew knelt down beside him. "Ready?" Her young voice was high and shrill.

Her bare fingers reached inside the pan, and Jeremy saw the spasm of agony twist the white features. She was tossing a live coal from hand to hand.

He gave a last brief squint along the tube.

"Fire!" He rolled away.

Fingers curled firmly about the red coal, lips drawn back with pain, she clamped the makeshift linstock down upon the touch hole and sprang back in the same motion. The big piece leaped like a thing alive.

Then the wind whipped the gray, clogging smoke to shreds, and through the eddying clouds the chase stood clear.

Distance dwarfed the sun-flashed splinter shower on her mainmast a dozen feet or so above the deck. But there was no mistaking it. The tall spar shivered, leaned sternward for a brief instant out of line, swayed slowly forward with the next roll. Stays parted, flying in the wind. A yard gave way, crashing to the deck, and suddenly the mast came toppling like a lightning-riven pine, cloaked in a tangled ruin of split canvas and broken cordage. With a twisting heave it went by the board in a shower of spray, ripping the bulwarks where the guns had barked a moment before. The flying hull stopped as though it had struck head on against a reef. The foremast snapped at the crosstrees; it hung long enough to beat the mainyard into splinters before it broke free itself to join the churning wreckage overside.

The *Republic's* crew were yelling; the men at the Long Tom worked like demons to reload as the bow went up. Tiredly Jeremy grinned and waved a hand aft. Mr.

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Everett knew his business. He was pointing them up to pass and repass stern and prow of the dismasted, wallowing hulk. They could take position and rake their crippled quarry into submission now at leisure. The captain's teeth showed white at the whooping gun crew. "Pour it in to them!" he yelled.

In spite of the gnawing pain of his wounds he dragged a sponging bucket across the deck, and kneeling, washed Eb'n Tilden's bleeding head until his first mate snorted and sat up. The twelve-pounder roared bull-throated again. . . .

"THREE hundred barrels of beef; three hundred barrels of flour; two thousand stand of muskets; two thousand new blankets. . . ."

Eb'n Tilden cracked his horny fingers together with a noise like a sprung steel trap. "An' how much powder?"

Young Robbin Stacey with a year of college qualifying him as clerk, dipped his quill afresh into the ink pot and ruffled the sheets on the table before him.

"Hundred an' fifty," he said, and made a check.

The old man cleared his throat and glanced at his captain propped up on the cabin berth. "All fer Genr'l Ross an' Admr'l Cochrane operatin' on the Chesapeake. Gonna be sorta fussed, both them bully boys is, I bet. My, my!" He waved more papers with the red wax of official seals. "Lot o' talk here o' a descent on Washin'ton. Balteemore too, so it 'pears. Huh!" He cackled savagely —jerked a thumb at the shattered hole in the cabin's farther wall.

"Took a nine-pound ball to bust that bad-luck charm!"

Jeremy blinked. An oval frame had hung there once. The splintered emptiness gaped mockingly; but strangely he didn't give a single good round whoop.

"One thousand pairs of military boots," young Stacey's voice droned on, "and"—it was evident he'd been saving for the climax—"a box of specie! Ain't been counted, though," he added by way of qualification.

His captain merely moved restlessly. The tight bandages eased his wounds, but it was hard to brace against the roll. The first officer snarled at Mr. Stacey.

"That'll do! Ye kin finish checkin' later. Git topside!" and glared the clerk into hasty retreat.

"Lord!" said Eb'n Tilden. It was half invocation. "What a haul! Wuth a headache!" He touched his bandaged head. "That brig's new—fust viyage out. Got jury masts rigged while you was lyin' here knocked cold." He grinned. "She'll fetch a pretty down at Boston—a right tidy sum! Transferred a mite o' that beef an' fresh flour aboard us too. Reckon we'll fetch Scituate fat an' sassy!"

He licked his lips at the thought, pulled a black plug from his trouser's pocket, detached some fuzz and a piece of tarred string, and worried the cleared section through with his teeth.

"Boy," he said, "boy, ef I wasn't a married man!"

Head a-cock he squinted like a satyr.

"Where in tarnation's yer guts? Ye got the stablest craft I ever seen right in yer hands! All's ye got to do is run in close an' call fer boarders. Reckon she ain't in no mind to put up a fight." He snorted. "Ef I was only a spry young louse again!"

The stamp of his departing footsteps echoed down the companion stairs.

LYING very still on the berth, Jeremy Spry could see the girl faintly through nearly closed eyelids as she came quietly into the cabin. He looked as if he were asleep.

She was what Aunt Freelove would call a superior woman—a very superior woman. He'd never been at ease with girls; and he reckoned this one had no cause to think much of him. But he knew he loved her.

When she placed cool fingers to his fevered head he opened his eyes, and in spite of her faint protest half sat up. She blushed, and for the second time that day he was aware of the warm, strong beauty of her. It was surprising how nice the scattering of freckles set off the healthy flush of her suntanned cheeks.

"I thought you were asleep," she said.

Because his heart pounded thick in his throat, his answer was merely a grunt. It was almost as if he had struck her, but when she saw the lean homely face break into a grin, she smiled tremulously back. He thought for a moment she was going to cry, and panic swept him. He blurted the first thing that came to his head—Aunt Freelove had always opined a man's mind was in his stomach.

"I feel right hungry," he said; and then felt like a fool.

She laughed. "Fresh biscuits?"

He glanced down at her poor bandaged hands, and when he met her eyes again there was a lump in his throat.

"With those burns? Oh no, I reckon not!"

Pleased laughter caused her gray eyes to darken. "I figured you'd be hungry! Paw always said a man's belly got emptier'n a buoy keg during a fight. You Ezekiel!" she called.

"Comin', Miss Anne—a-comin'!" The ex-cook's features framed by the cabin door were disapproving. "Here they be!" He put the steaming platter on the table. "Lord above, Miss Anne, you sure must think a heap o' a man to go a-kneadin' an' a-pushin' dough with burns like your'n!"

She was certainly a superior woman.

There was the plate of golden biscuits, hot and succulent on the table; but somehow Jeremy couldn't concentrate on them a bit. It wasn't because of the splinter-torn chest; the pain, it seemed, had gone. He reached out almost aimlessly at last for the platter, but his fingers merely crumbled the first crisp shell—and of a sudden he knew he had no appetite for such earthly things. When he looked up she was that close. . . .

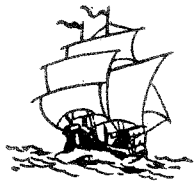
Her mouth had a taste he'd never known. Fresh sugared strawberries maybe came nearest it, with perhaps just a dash of cream from the old brown crock Aunt Freelove kept in the dairy spring.

Captain Jeremy Spry had his good-luck charm clutched tight in his arms at last. He needn't have held her quite so close, for she gave no evidence of ever wanting to go at all when he tasted her lips again.

On the deck above, Eb'n Tilden forced his eyes away from the skylight at his feet and arched an airily accurate stream of tobacco juice over the lee rail. For the first and only time in his career he broke the iron-clad rule of the sea. With a jerk of his thumb at the transome light, he spoke to the man at the wheel.

"Hauled down his colors—he's struck by gum!"

The helmsman grinned, glancing aloft as he swung her just a mite closer to the wind. The *Young Republic* seemed to dance, pointing her racing bows for Scituate.



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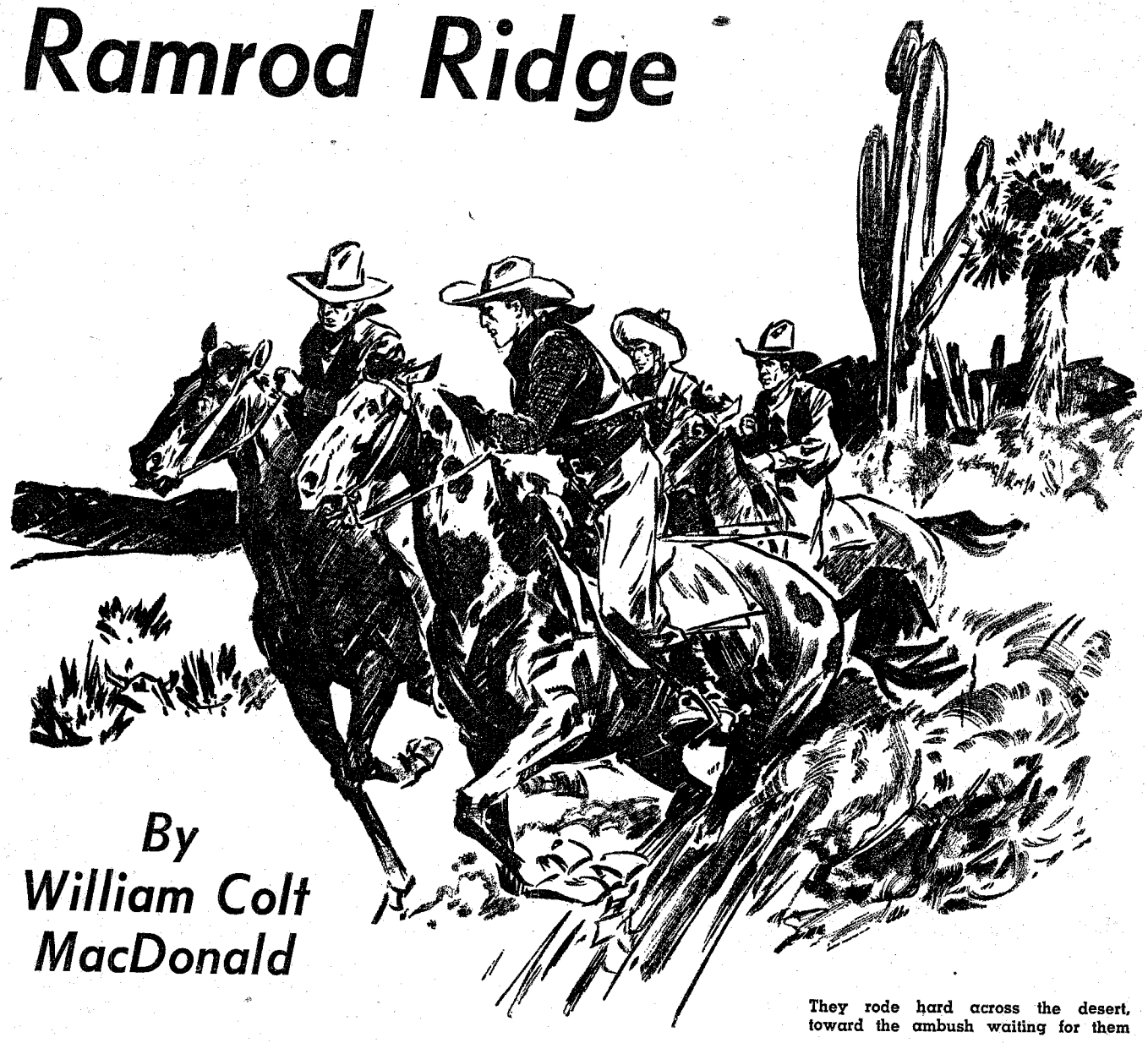
Ramrod Ridge



They rode hard across the desert, toward the ambush waiting for them

By William Colt MacDonald

SOMEWHERE in that strange California desert thirty thousand dollars in gold is hidden. Young FRED VINCENT had the task of transporting this treasure to a bank; and when his train was held up by bandits, he alone managed to escape—with the gold. Then he vanished, to turn up at last on the desert, haggard, wounded, and unconscious.

It is NOGALES SCOTT and CALIPER MAXWELL who take Fred Vincent to his father's ranch. Guided by a Mexican named ESTEBAN (whom they call STEVE) the two men have come into the Ramrod Ridge country to investigate the mystery of the vanished gold. Young Vincent must know where the treasure lies, but he is unconscious and in grave need of a doctor's attention.

FROM the wounded man's father, ETHAN VINCENT, Nogales and Caliper learn about the brigands of Ramrod Ridge. They are commanded by an enormous, shrewd, brutal man named SIMON CRAWFORD and his word is the law of that desert country. He seeks the lost treasure; what is more, he holds a mortgage on the Vincent ranch and is waiting his chance to seize it. Nogales and Caliper have already had one run-in with Crawford, and when a night marauder steals up to the ranch and takes several shots at them, they decide to teach Crawford a lesson.

Actually, Simon Crawford was not responsible for the attempt to kill Nogales and Caliper. It was the work of his henchman TEN-SPOT NANCE, and Crawford is furious about it, because he has certain plans in connection with Nogales Scott. From his right-hand man DEACON TRUMBULL, Crawford has learned that Scott has inherited a large fortune. It is the pious-spoken Deacon's plan to kill Nogales and forge a will to the benefit of Crawford and himself. The Deacon can fake any man's handwriting, but it is necessary to obtain a sample of Scott's, and that is why Crawford wants to treat Nogales and Caliper with the appearance of friendship. They have a reputation as dangerous men, and he must proceed carefully.

But there is nothing friendly about Nogales' and Caliper's visit to Crawford's headquarters, a combination store and saloon, Expecting them because of the shooting the night before, Crawford has stationed a sentry out on the porch. Quite suddenly that sentry backs into the room with his hands raised, and after him come Nogales, Caliper and the Mexican Steve, their forty-fives drawn. . . .

CHAPTER XI

GUNS FOR PROFIT

THE cowboys were grinning widely as they entered the room, but they were alert for the slightest hostile sign on the part of any of its occupants. Deacon Trumbull and the other men at the table started to reach toward

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their holsters, but Crawford quickly stopped that move.

"Leave be," he growled. "They got us covered."

Arms immediately went into the air. Crawford sat as before, one hand in his lap, the other clutching a glass of whiskey. He asked coldly, "What's the meaning of this?"

Nogales grinned cheerfully. "Sorry if we've misjudged you and your gang, Crawford, but we didn't know what to expect. We saw your guard on the porch and figured he was there to tip you off, so we pulled our irons when we arrived and signaled him to keep quiet. He got the idea right off. We figured if you were waiting for us with drawn guns that he'd try to save his own hide by warning you, but I reckon, maybe, we were mistaken."

"Why should we be waiting for you with drawn guns?" Crawford demanded.

"Considering you sent Ed Curry and another hombre to rub me out last night," Nogales said quietly, "it's only natural to expect it."

"Look here," Crawford said, "you got me wrong. I had nothing to do with ordering Curry and some other hombre out to the Rancho de Paz. If they went out there, they did it on their own hook. It wasn't any of my ordering."

Studying the man, Nogales was inclined to believe him. Crawford asked for details. Nogales gave them. Crawford again shook his head. "I don't know anything about it," he said emphatically, "and I don't know who went with Curry. Curry has been hanging around here for some time, but he doesn't work for me."

"I sort of doubt that," Nogales said flatly.

The Deacon murmured, "He who doubts is damned."

Nogales flashed a quick grin toward the Deacon. "And there's another saying from that same book, you mealy-mouthed old hypocrite, that says, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' "

The Deacon's eyes widened, his jaw dropped. Crawford grunted, "If you hombres didn't come here to hold a Sunday School class, what did you come for?"

The eyes of every man in the room were on Nogales now.

Nogales said, "Like I told you, we were half-expecting trouble when we came in to let you know we'd returned Curry's body and to warn you not to try anything of the kind again."

"I've told you I didn't have anything to do with it," Crawford rumbled.

"The same warning goes for anybody else in this room that did have a hand in last night's game," Nogales said coldly.

Crawford said sarcastically, "This isn't just a social call, then?"

"Call it that, if you like," Caliper replied. "We brought our calling cards. They're made of lead and they come out of a forty-five muzzle. Would you like to see 'em?"

Crawford raised one huge impatient hand. "You can put your guns away. Nobody here is going to pull on you. Cripes! I'd like to be friends with you boys, if you'd give me half a chance. I've got liquor and grub to sell here. That's all I'm interested in. I won't get your business if you and me are on the outs. Tony, set up drinks all around. We'll drink to these hombres who come new to our little settlement."

"We'll buy our own drinks," Nogales said shortly. However, he and his companions put their guns away as they strode to the bar. Tony, the barkeep, at once got busy pouring drinks. With an effort, Crawford raised his huge bulk from the chair and made his way to Nogales' side. Only now, did Nogales realize how massive the man was. He towered over Nogales, and Nogales wasn't a small man by any means.

WHEN the cowboys had put down their empty glasses, Crawford spoke. "If this isn't just a social call, what brings you here? Yeah, I know, you brought me Ed Curry's body—and you've given me a certain warning. But you're wrong if you think I'm set against you. Now, is there anything else on your mind?"

Nogales nodded. "You hold a paper on the Rancho de Paz. Mr. Vincent borrowed thirty thousand dollars from you."

Crawford nodded warily. "That's right. Did Vincent send you here to talk to me about it?"

Nogales shook his head. "He doesn't even know I intended mentioning it. I offered to take the paper off your hands, but he couldn't see it thataway."

"*You* offered?" Crawford sneered. "Where would you get the money?"

"I've a hunch you already know that," Nogales replied quietly. "The fact is, Mr. Vincent owes you thirty thousand dollars."

"With interest?" Crawford added. "Ten percent."

"He that is greedy of gain, troubleth his own house," Nogales quoted glibly, with a quick side glance toward the Deacon. The Deacon gulped.

Crawford frowned. "One psalm-singer is enough around here," he growled. "I said ten percent and that's what I meant. That's one way I make my living. If you don't like the idea of ten percent why—hell, it's none of your business anyway."

"Ten percent it is," Nogales said. He had a stub of pencil out, jotting down figures in a notebook. He put the notebook and pencil away and named a sum. Crawford nodded. Nogales went on, "I'd like to take that loan off your hands."

"Why you cutting in on this business?" Crawford frowned. "Particularly if Vincent doesn't know you're doing it?"

Nogales said bluntly, "I figure that paper will be better in my hands than yours. You figure to get the Rancho de Paz, but I don't see it thataway."

Crawford rumbled, "You can't force me to turn that paper over to you."

"Correct," Nogales snapped. "But I'm betting ten bucks against a plugged *peso* that I could talk Vincent into accepting a loan, before he'd let you take the Rancho de Paz away from him. And I wouldn't charge him any ten percent either. And once he had that money, you couldn't refuse it."

Slowly, Crawford shook his great head. "That loan has got a mite over a month to run yet," he said slowly. "I figure to get all my interest."

"Cripes!" Nogales said impatiently. "I'll give you your percent up to the time of the note."

"What you so anxious to get that note for?" Crawford inquired.

"That," Nogales said, "is my business. Either you accept my offer or you don't. I got my mind made up you're never going to own the Rancho de Paz."

Studying him, Crawford said: "Just to prove I want to

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be friendly, I'll let you have that note, Scott. Got the money on you?"

Nogales said, "You known damn well I wouldn't be carrying that much cash. I haven't even got my check book."

Crawford guffawed scornfully. "You ain't thinking I'd take a piece of paper, are you ? How do I know it'd be good?"

Here the Deacon cut in, "Simon, I want to talk to you a minute."

Crawford looked angrily at his henchman. "Listen, Deacon," he commenced.

"This is important," the Deacon said earnestly.

SOMEWHAT skeptically, Crawford allowed himself to be drawn to one side. The Deacon spoke to him low-voiced. "Take that check."

"It might not be any good," Crawford protested.

"I figure it will be good," the Deacon insisted. "You take that check. We've been figuring how we could get a specimen of Scott's handwriting. Here's our chance."

Crawford's eyes narrowed. "Maybe you're right, Deacon. I'm commencing to see what you mean."

He returned to Nogales' side, saying, "I reckon Deacon Trumbull must know something about you, Scott. He figures your check would be good. All right, I'll take a chance."

Nogales nodded shortly. "I'll be in tomorrow with the check . . . . Ready, boys?"

Caliper and Steve nodded. The three walked carefully to the doorway, watching Crawford and his men every step of the way. Crawford said angrily, "You three act like you were afraid of getting shot in the back."

Caliper grinned and pulled his gun.

"Never did believe in turning my back on a rattlers' nest," Caliper said coolly.

Crawford growled a curse. The Deacon said in injured tones, "You judge us all wrong. We wouldn't harm a hair of your heads."

Nogales nodded shortly. "We know, Deacon, we know. You mean well; you just get misled."

The three cowboys slipped quickly through the doorway. An instant later there came the swift pounding of receding hoofs. Crawford drew a long angry breath. "That Nogales," he burst out, "is too damn smart! He knew I was half inclined to give the word to plug them three."

"What!" The Deacon looked dismayed. "Before we get a sample of his handwriting? There's no profit in that."

Crawford growled. "I ain't yet sure I want a profit from that direction. Maybe we'd just be meddling with trouble if we forge a will with his name on it. I got a hunch it might be safer to forget him. Up to now I felt fair certain that I could get the Rancho de Paz—and here I've thrown over that chance for a gamble. It's all too uncertain. I don't know why in hell he has to come into my country—"

"Forget it, Simon," the Deacon said soothingly. "By tomorrow, we'll have his signature. Once we have that, you leave things to me. I'll show you plenty "

"You'd better," Crawford said threateningly. "At the same time I got a hunch it'd be safer to have Scott bumped off right now. Maybe we'll do that yet. There's no use running chances."

CHAPTER XII

THEY WON'T COME BACK

BY THE time Nogales, Caliper and Steve arrived back at the Rancho de Paz, they saw a stranger sitting on the house gallery with Polly Vincent and her father. Vincent hailed the cowboys as they started to rein their ponies around the house. They dismounted and ascended the steps to be introduced to Doctor Zach Stebbings. Stebbings was elderly with sparse gray hair and range-weathered features. He looked efficient.

His blue eyes twinkled as he took Nogales' hand. "So you're the cowpoke with more money than good sense, eh?" He smiled, then at Nogales' uncomprehending frown, explained, "I mean that check you sent, with word I was to remain here until Fred was on his feet."

"Oh, that." Nogales grinned. "Was it enough?"

"More than enough, son. Don't you know I'm tickled pink for a chance to remain at the Ranch de Paz for a spell. My assistant has taken over most of my practice, anyway, in San Rivedino."

"You got here a heap faster than we expected," Nogales said.

"Doc Stebbings surprised me, too," Ethan Vincent put in. "He tells me the Southern Pacific has laid rails clear to Moonstone—Moonstone is a small settlement about fifteen miles northwest of here. Don't know as I should even call it a settlement—just a few 'dobe houses and a saloon or two."

"How is Fred Vincent?" Caliper asked.

Doc Stebbings was noncommittal. "His wounds don't amount to much. I've done all possible in that direction. However, his memory seems gone. He acts as though he'd been through a terrifying experience of some sort. All we can do now is let him gain strength, and see if he doesn't get back to normal. Right now he seems pretty exhausted."

Steve left to take the horses around to the corral. Polly Vincent appeared on the gallery and sat and talked with the men. Nogales said, rather uncertainly after a time, "Mr. Vincent, I've arranged to take that loan paper off Simon Crawford's hands. Probably I shouldn't have gone ahead without speaking to you first, but—"

Vincent frowned. "Why did you do that, Nogales?"

Nogales lifted a bronzed, hairy hand to scratch the stubble on his jaw.

"I didn't want to take a chance on you losing the Rancho de Paz to that rattler."

Vincent swallowed heavily. "I'm already in your debt, Nogales. You shouldn't have done it. I'll never be able to repay that money, unless we can find that missing gold."

"Look, Mr. Vincent," Nogales said earnestly. "You wouldn't accept a loan from me. There was nothing else I could do, if I wanted to see you get a square deal. You're under no obligations. I'll make money from the interest. If you never paid me, I'd have a nice property here."

"Nogales!" Polly's eyes looked moist. "We know just how much you figure to make money on such a deal. I don't think we know how to thank you. But you won't lose anything."

"I swear you won't," Vincent said earnestly. "When Fred regains his health, I feel sure he can tell us what

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Caliper backed out, saying: "Never did believe in turning my back on a rattlers' nest"

became of that missing thirty thousand—don't you, doc?"

Doc Stebbings said, "Of course, of course," but his words didn't sound very convincing.

"Well, that's all settled, anyway," Nogales cut in. "At least you won't have to worry about that loan now." He grinned cheerfully. "One thing I always did crave to do and that was give an extension on a loan note. Now all we got to concentrate on is getting Fred on his feet—"

"And," Caliper put in, "getting Simon Crawford and his sidewinders off'n theirs. Maybe it's a good thing we got a doctor here. There might be some shooting occur from time to time."

"There's a bad crew hanging out at Ramrod Ridge, Ethan tells me," Doc Stebbings said. "I'm glad I didn't have to come through there on my way here. Why don't they have a law officer there?"

"I've written the county seat about getting a law officer," Vincent said, "but it seems the authorities there don't pay any attention to my requests."

"Maybe," Nogales said thoughtfully, "that will be attended to in time."

THE following morning, accompanied by Caliper and Steve, Nogales rode into Ramrod Ridge to take over the note Crawford held. The three weren't pushing the ponies hard. Nogales looked thoughtful. Caliper said, "What's on your mind, pard?"

"It's this way," Nogales explained. "I've got a hunch it might not be good sense to give Crawford a check for that money. Don't ask me why. It's just a hunch. First Crawford refused a check, then Deacon Trumbull said something that made him change his mind. I'd like to know what Trumbull said.

"But there's something in the setup I don't like. Maybe we better keep right on riding, clear to San Rivedino. We can get the money there and be back in plenty time. Besides, maybe I'll have some other business in that town when we get there."

Caliper and Steve didn't ask questions. The rest of the ride to Ramrod Ridge was made in silence. The horses were pulled to a halt before Crawford's store and bar building. Nogales said, "Wait here, I'll be out in a minute."

Caliper and Steve waited while Nogales entered the building. A couple of tough-looking customers sat sunning themselves on the store porch, but they had nothing to say to Caliper or his companion. Within a few min-

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utes, Nogales emerged, grinning widely, and climbed up to his saddle.

Caliper said, "What's up?"

"We head for San Rivedino. I don't know why, but it threw a monkey wrench into the works when I told Crawford I'd get him the money instead of giving a check. Deacon Trumbull nearly had an apoplectic fit. The two of 'em tried to talk me out of the money idea. They were more than willing to take a check. They were so willing in fact, that I decided it would be bad business to fall in with their plans. Let's ride!"

The three gathered their reins, jabbed spurs into the ponies' ribs and headed out toward the desert floor.

Inside Crawford's store, there was considerable cursing going on. "Damn that Nogales!" Crawford raged. "He's too smart!"

"But what do you suppose made him change his mind?" the Deacon asked furiously. "Here, we had the whole thing worked out—all but a specimen of his handwriting, then he announces he's going to give you cash instead. I don't understand it."

"There's a hell of a lot you don't understand," Crawford said wrathfully. "I've listened to your plans long enough, Deacon. Now we'll do things my way."

"What you aiming to do?" the Deacon asked.

Crawford struggled to hold his voice to normal. "Use your head, dammit! Scott said he was going to give me cash instead of a note. The nearest place he can raise that much cash is San Rivedino. All right, he'll have thirty thousand cash, plus the interest owing me. Somebody will have to meet him and his partners on the way back and relieve 'em of their load—and wipe 'em out."

"But, Simon—" the Deacon started a protest.

"I said I was doing the thinking from now on," Crawford told him savagely. "Deacon, you got a job to do. Take enough men."

"All right," the Deacon said meekly. "I'll take Limpy and Hedge and Ten-spot. That'll make four against those three."

"You talk more like a fool all the time," Crawford growled. "You'll take those three and seven others. Who you pick is your business, but I want the job done right. You've got to get that money and wipe out Scott and his pals. Understand that? Don't let 'em escape!"

CHAPTER XIII

I AM THE LAW

NOGALES and his two companions didn't push their ponies hard through the desert heat. There was considerable wind blowing, hurling sand and dust in their faces. They rode with their bandannas drawn up across the lower halves of their features. Ahead rose two mighty mountain peaks, San Gorgonio and San Jacinto.

Here, where they traveled, however, were great expanses of yellow sand, dotted with creosote bush and catclaw. Overhead, the sky was a great stretch of turquoise that, at times, seemed almost like blue flame.

"Damned if I know," Caliper grumbled, "why we're making this hot ride to San Rivedino, when you could just as well have given Crawford a check."

"Don't know exactly why, myself," Nogales replied cheerfully, "except that Crawford and Deacon Trumbull were too damn anxious to get my check."

They rode on. Shortly past noon time they stopped in Moonstone, which proved to be a collection of shacks, surrounded by desert willows. Nearby, a gang of section hands were engaged in laying railroad tracks to the accompaniment of much cursing on the part of a burly foreman. Pausing at one of the saloons for a drink, Nogales recognized the bartender as a man he had known in Texas, named Waco Brown. Brown was a husky, hard-featured individual for whom Nogales had once turned a favor.

"Well, I'll be damned," Brown said, recognizing Nogales as they strode into the saloon. He thrust out one hand.

Nogales and his companions moved up to the rough board bar and Nogales performed introductions. "Long time no see, Waco."

"Too long a time," Brown grinned widely. "What'll you have? This is on me."

They ordered drinks. Brown placed three bottles of beer on the bar. While the beer was consumed, Nogales and Waco exchanged gossip relative to former days spent in Texas. Brown asked, after a time, "What you doing here?"

"Just rambling around, like usual," Nogales replied. "Last few days we've been visiting at the Rancho de Paz, over near Ramrod Ridge."

Brown frowned. "Every once in a while I hear rumors about Ramrod Ridge. Fellers drift in here, passing through, and after a few drinks their tongues start to wag. I gather there's a tough crew of hombres over that way."

"They just think they're tough," Caliper put in. "Maybe they're due to be whittled down a mite."

Brown's face lighted up. "If it wa'n't for this wooden leg of mine, I might enjoy throwing in with you fellers for some lead throwing. But them days are past for me. You know"—to Caliper and Steve—"if it wasn't for Nogales, I probably wouldn't be here now. He saved my life once, when I got caught in front of a herd of stampeding cows. Damned if he didn't ride right in among 'em and h'ist me off'n the ground. I was sure battered up plenty. Right leg had to come off. Lemme see, that's dang nigh twelve years ago, ain't it, Nogales?"

"Pretty close," Noggles nodded. He settled his hat more firmly on his head. "We've got to go to San Rivedino on business, Waco. We'll probably see you on the way back." He paused a moment, then lowered his voice, "If any of those sidewinders from Ramrod Ridge get over this way, don't mention that you know me."

"Not a word," Waco said.

The men talked a few minutes longer, then took their departure and climbed back into saddles. They rode steadily for an hour, their heads bent against the swirling dust and wind. Now, when they glanced up, San Gorgonio peak seemed much closer.

IT WAS evening by the time they rode down the main street of San Rivedino. The town was growing fast; even though the banks and stores were closed, there was plenty of activity. Farmers' wagons passed through the streets; cow ponies were lined at hitchracks. At one edge of the town, locomotives puffed and snorted through the railroad yards.

"Mighty up-and-coming burg," Nogales mused, as the three walked their ponies down the main street. "Maybe

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Vincent knew what he was talking about when he said this was the coming country—once the crooks had been stamped out."

"I got a hunch we'll play our share in that direction, too," Caliper said.

The three found rooms at a hotel for the night, then started out to get something to eat. The evening passed quickly, and by bedtime, Nogales had located the various spots he intended to visit the following day.

The next morning, after breakfast, while Steve and Caliper waited under a tree in San Rivedino's plaza, Nogales paid a visit to the bank. Within an hour he was back, carrying with him a small canvas sack, which he turned over to Caliper.

Caliper hefted the sack. "Thirty thousand in here?" he asked. "Don't feel very heavy."

"There's more than thirty thousand there,. Don't forget Crawford's interest. Bills, gold and silver. It's all there, cowboy. Guard it careful." He started to turn away.

Caliper said, "Where you going?"

Nogales motioned down the street. "There's a drugstore down the line. I want to stop in there a minute, then I'm figuring to pay a call at the county building and see the sheriff of Rivedino County."

"What for?" Caliper asked.

"Cripes! Do I have to tell you everything?" Nogales grinned.

"I don't think you know enough for that," Caliper returned. "Hey, there's a drugstore just across the way. It looks like a right nice one too."

"That's why I'm not going there," Nogales chuckled. "The drugstore I got in mind hasn't got that kind of reputation."

He strode off, leaving Steve and Caliper staring in bewilderment after him.

Steve shook his head. "Now I'm wonder to what he is up."

"I am too," Caliper admitted. "Nogales is cooking something in that noodle of his, but he won't tell us what it is, until the time comes to spill it."

They sat in the plaza, watching horses, wagons and men stream past. Caliper muttered, "Now what would a drugstore have to offer Nogales? C'mon, Steve, let's you and me go 'cross to that drugstore over there. Might be we'll see something that'll give us an idea. We ain't getting any place just sitting here thinking about it."

Meanwhile, Nogales was just completing a transaction in a drugstore situated in one of the rougher sections of town. The proprietor, a shifty-eyed man, gave Nogales a small paper-wrapped package. Some money passed between the two, and Nogales strode outside, murmuring, "Sleep sure comes high, sometimes."

FROM the drugstore he made his way back to the main section of town and fifteen minutes later was entering a two-story brick building with a sign over the main doorway which proclaimed it as the Rivedino County Building. Nogales found the office he sought. A door stood open and over it swung a sign reading: *Jamison Burger, Sheriff, Rivedino County.*

Nogales stepped through the partly opened doorway into the sheriff's office. There were two men within, both seated at desks. One desk, the smaller one, stood in a far corner, and behind it was a long, raw-boned individual bent over some ledgers—probably monthly expense accounts, Nogales surmised. The man was dressed in a new suit of stiff black and his white collar fitted too tightly about his neck. He looked like an outdoors man, however; his skin was sun-bronzed, and his fingers, clutching a pen, appeared as if they might be more familiar with bridle reins.

"Sheriff Burger?" Nogales asked.

The clerk looked up briefly, nodded toward the other desk against the opposite wall, and resumed his work on the ledgers. The other desk was much larger, though there was nothing on it—except a pair of booted feet. The boots were well shined and little worn; the spurs attached were shiny and clean. At the other end of the boots was their owner, slumped back in his desk chair. He seemed to be about half asleep, though a fat cigar protruded from one corner of his fleshy lips.

"You Burger?" Nogales asked.

Sheriff Burger cocked open one drowsy eye and surveyed Nogales. He didn't look pleased at having his nap interrupted. Finally his other eye opened. He looked at Nogales with ill-concealed irritation, before replying, pompously, "I'm Jamison Burger—Sheriff Jamison Burger, of Rivedino County. What do you want?"

"My name's Scott. I'm here on behalf of Ethan Vincent. Vincent owns the Rancho de Paz, down near Ramrod Ridge."

Burger removed the cigar from his mouth. "Am I supposed to get excited about the information?" he sneered.

"From what I've seen," Nogales drawled insolently, "I can't imagine you getting excited about much of anything—unless maybe it would be losing your job." He added darkly, "Maybe that can be attended to, too."

Burger's feet came down from the desk; he sat straighter in his chair. "Say, what do you want anyway?"

"Cooperation from your office."

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"What sort of cooperation?"

"Mr. Vincent wrote you sometime back, asking that a deputy be appointed at Ramrod Ridge. He's heard nothing since."

Burger frowned. "Ramrod Ridge . . . Ramrod Ridge . . . Oh, yeah, that's that little collection of shacks down south of here a spell. Humph! What does Vincent figure a deputy is needed there for? Lemme see, seems like a feller named Crawford runs a general store there—"

"That's why a deputy is needed. Conditions in Ramrod Ridge are pretty bad."

"Huh!" Burger snorted impatiently. "We can't appoint a deputy for every jerkwater town in this county. Yeah, I remember Vincent's letter now. Ethan Vincent the name was." He twisted sidewise in his chair to speak to his clerk, "Peters, you ought to remember Vincent's letter. I turned it over to you to answer. What did you tell him?"

THE clerk raised his head. Nogales saw now he was a rather well featured young fellow with a lean, muscular jaw. He spoke with a Texas drawl, direct and to the point, "You told me, Sheriff, to file the letter and forget it—that we couldn't waste time on anybody that far off." Having spoken, the clerk resumed his work.

Burger's face flushed. He couldn't quite meet Nogales' eyes now. After a moment he blustered, "Peters must be wrong. I wouldn't give an order of that kind."

Again the clerk raised his head. "I'm not wrong," he said emphatically, and again went back to work.

Burger looked angry but lacked the nerve to contradict his clerk. He said to Nogales, "Peters is new here—only been with me a month. Really couldn't afford a clerk in my office—trying to save the taxpayers all I can, y'understand—but Peters' uncle happens to be a representative up at the capital and a job had to be found for the man—"

The clerk cut in calmly, "You asked for a clerk. I was sent here. God knows I don't like it any better than you do."

Nogales said, "So you're trying to save the taxpayers' money, eh, Burger? And I come in here and find you dozing at your desk. Oh, this will be a lovely story to tell at Sacramento."

"Dammit!" Burger snapped. "I do my duty—" He broke off suddenly, then, "Where do you say? You mean at the capital?"

"Sacramento's the capital, isn't it?" Nogales said coldly.

"Who do you know up there?" Burger demanded.

Nogales laughed scornfully. "Do you mean to say you never heard the governor speak of Nogales Scott?"

Burger turned pale. "You a friend of the governor's?"

Nogales gave a disgusted sigh and turned toward the doorway. "I might as well be on my way," he said sadly. "I always like to turn in good reports on members of the party holding office, but this is one time I'll just have to tell the facts as I see them. There's going to be a lot of votes lost to the party, I'm afraid, unless we make some radical changes right now. We can't afford to antagonize our constituents. This is going to create an uproar at the capital."

Sheriff Burger stumbled up out of his chair and frantically seized Nogales' arm. "Don't go," he pleaded. Perspiration beaded his forehead. "I wouldn't want the governor to get an idea— Let's talk this over."

"Too late for that," Nogales said sternly. "There's a report to be made and I'll have to tell the truth." He allowed himself to be drawn back into the room while he talked. "I'd heard things were bad in this neck of the range, but until now I couldn't believe it. I said to him, 'No, I can't believe Jamison Burger would disregard the welfare of the party—' "

"You said to who?" Burger quavered.

"Who in hell are we talking about?" Nogales snapped irritatedly. "Can't you even wake up enough to listen?"

"The—the governor," Burger said shakily.

Nogales could scarcely keep his face straight. He shook his head as if he couldn't believe the evidence of his ears, then bent a steely glance on the shivering Burger. "I'm sorry for you, Burger, but it's your own fault. Don't say I didn't warn you and give you a decent chance. I could have headed straight for Sacramento, but I decided I'd give you a chance to tell your story first. Well, what I've heard is true, I reckon. I'll be getting on."

"Wait, wait," Burger said almost tearfully. "Just tell me what I can do. Just give me a decent chance, Mr. Scott."

"Did you give Mr. Vincent a chance," Nogales asked hard-voiced, "when he asked for a deputy at Ramrod Ridge? He paused, as though struck with a new thought. "Maybe you're working hand in glove with Simon Crawford. What a dirty mess this is!"

"Don't say that," Burger begged. "Maybe I've been lax, but I'm honest. Just tell me what to do."

"Look!" Nogales' manner changed suddenly. "I'm willing to give you a break. All I ask is that you appoint a deputy for Ramrod Ridge."

"I'll do it," Burger gasped gratefully. "I'll have one there within a week."

"Phaugh!" Nogales disgustedly. "I want one there now. I want a deputy who can leave right off."

"But look, Mr. Scott," Burger pleaded, "I can't get a deputy out of thin air. Where could I get one on such short notice?"

"Peters," Nogales said, taking matters into his own hands, "how'd you like to be a deputy?"

Peters smiled suddenly, "I'd sure welcome a chance at it."

"But—but," Burger protested, "Peters is only a clerk. What would he know about enforcing the law? Let me pick you a good man."

"I prefer my own judgment," Nogales snapped, "after what I've seen of you. Now I've wasted enough time. You going to swear Peters in, or aren't you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Scott," Burger said humbly. "Peters, raise your right hand, while I administer the oath."

FIVE minutes later, Nogales and Peters were leaving the office. On Peters' chest was pinned a deputy's badge. Sheriff Burger looked fearfully after the two. "I—I hope, Mr. Scott," he said in shaky tones, "that you give the governor a good report of my cooperation."

"I'll think about it," Nogales said shortly. "If you don't hear from him right off, you'll know your job is safe for a spell longer."

On the street, Peters looked curiously at Nogales. "Say, is the governor of California really a friend of yours?"

Nogales chuckled. "I'm sure glad that Burger didn't ask me the governor's name!"

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Peters heaved a long appreciative sigh. "I had a hunch you might be running a bluff." He grinned. Suddenly he ripped off the stiff white collar he was wearing. "I'll be so damn glad to get into some comfortable clothes again. Say, is this Ramrod Ridge as bad as you made out?"

Nogales nodded soberly. "Bad situation there. I don't know how you'll take to it."

"I reckon to make out all right," Peters drawled.

"You're cow-country stuff," Nogales commented.

"Some," Peters admitted.

"Howcome you took a job pushing a pen?"

Peters explained that. "My Uncle John Nesbitt, he's a member of the California legislature, he got me to come out here, figuring I might like to work in some new country. He got me the job. You know how politics are. I finally ended up as a clerk in Burger's office. Never could make the fat clown understand that I wasn't meant for that sort of work, but he wouldn't even listen to what I had to say. He's so damn lazy he just wanted a man to do his clerical work."

"What was your last job, before you came to California?" Nogales asked.

"I was a member of Company M, Texas Rangers, before I resigned to come out here," Peters said quietly.

Nogales' jaw dropped. "You a Texas Ranger?" Suddenly he burst into a howl of laughter. "Good Lord! I reckon the joke's on me!"

CHAPTER XIV

WELCOME TO AMBUSH

THEY found Caliper and Steve waiting impatiently in the plaza. By this time, Peters had gone to his hotel and got into his working togs as he called them, and which consisted of corduroys, woolen shirt, riding boots and Stetson—not to mention his holstered Colt and Winchester rifle.

"Meet Rod Peters, boys," Nogales said. "Rod is an ex-Texas Ranger so I don't figure he'll have too much trouble administering the law in Ramrod Ridge."

They shook hands. "Cripes!" Caliper said, surprised, "I didn't think they ever would get around to appointing a deputy, like Vincent wanted."

Peters smiled, "Mr. Vincent can thank Nogales for that. Nogales sort of used his persuasive powers on our sheriff." He went on, giving details. When he had concluded, Caliper and Steve howled with laughter.

"Say, Nogales," Caliper asked, "what did you go to that drugstore for?"

"Still curious, eh?" Nogales grinned. "You'll find out in good time—maybe. I'm working on something that may not come to a head."

Steve put in, chuckling, "Caliper and me, we make the visit to the drugstore across the street, but we could not see anything you might buy."

"You probably wouldn't in that drugstore," Nogales said. "Did you buy anything?"

"I almost forgot to tell you," Caliper burst out. "That drugstore across the way sells a new kind of drink. It's called soda water. It's just bubbly sort of, with flavors in it."

"What kind of liquor do they put in?" Nogales asked.

"Not none," Caliper replied. "Just flavors. I had three vanillas and a strawberry. Steve, he sort of went for lemon and cherry. They're danged good. Maybe I'll never touch whiskey again."

"I'm glad you put in that 'maybe,'" Nogales said dryly.

"I mean it," Caliper said earnestly. "Come on across and have one on me."

Nogales shook his head. "Nothing doing. One more vanilla and you'd be rolling in the gutter, making a disgraceful spectacle of yourself."

"Best way to forestall that," Rod Peters said seriously, "is to saddle up and get out of town pronto. I'd like to get to my new job as soon as possible."

"Right," Nogales nodded. "We'll get our horses. Bring that money, Caliper, if you haven't lost it."

"Money?" Peters looked surprised.

Nogales motioned toward the canvas sack in Caliper's hand. "There's thirty thousand plus in that sack."

Peters said, "My God!" and moved his gun nearer the front. He was commencing to wonder just how crazy these punchers were. Ten minutes later the four men were riding out of San Rivedino.

THE sun was directly overhead by this time. It was hot going and the dry wind hadn't abated any. Bandannas were drawn up across mouths and noses.

They were still twenty miles from Moonstone when Nogales spoke to his companions. "I'm going to push on ahead, fellers. You keep right on the way you are. I'll be back before you reach Moonstone."

"Where you going?" Caliper asked suspiciously.

"I'm heading for Moonstone to see that they have plenty vanilla ready when you get there."

"No fooling," Caliper said irritatedly. "What you got on your mind, something pertaining to drugstores?"

"You guessed it," Nogales grinned, knowing Caliper wouldn't believe him. "I tell you what, you tell Rod

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what's happened around Ramrod Ridge, while I'm gone. Give him the whole story. I'll be back before you know it, almost."

Without waiting for further protestations or questions, Nogales pressed spurs to his pony and plunged ahead. Before he had gone a mile, his form was lost in the swirling clouds of dust and sand. . . .

Something less than two hours later, Caliper, peering anxiously ahead, saw a rider looming up on the horizon. The wind had dropped somewhat by this time and visibility was higher.

"Rider coming," Caliper announced. The others straightened in their saddles.

"Eet does not look like Nogales," Steve said, after a moment. "That ees, eet ees not Nogales' *caballo.*"

"That certain ain't Nogales' horse," Rod Peters agreed. "Though it looks a heap like Nogales. But where did he get that paint horse?"

"You sure got eyes to make it a paint pony at this distance," Caliper added admiringly. "I was just wondering myself if it wa'n't a paint." And a few minutes later, as the rider rapidly approached, "It's a paint, sure enough. And Nogales is forking it. Now what in hell has he been up to?"

It was Nogales sure enough. Five minutes later he rode up in a swirling of dust and gravel on a half-wild pinto horse that was inclined to buck the instant Nogales drew rein. The pony was streaked with sweat and dust; its withers were foam-flecked. By this time the others had come to a halt.

"WHOA! You hammer-headed streak of lightning!" Nogales yelled through the settling dust. He surveyed the pinto horse with some admiration. "Cripes! After the pounding I gave you, you still hankerin' to sunfish me out of the saddle?" He grinned at his companions. "Boys, this here pony is one sweet traveler; he fair eats up distance. I wouldn't be surprised none if he had a streak of devil in him too. Started to buck the minute I forked him, but I threw in my hooks and he lit a shuck out of there so fast I sure figured we were flying part of the time."

"Lit a shuck out of where?" Caliper demanded.

"Who is belong to theese *caballo?*" Steve wanted to know.

Nogales laughed. "One at a time, boys, one at a time, and I'll give you the whole story. This paint horse belongs to Waco Brown—at least, he's holding it as collateral for drinks served to a Cahuilla Injun that hangs around Moonstone."

"You really been to Moonstone?" Caliper's eyes widened.

Nogales chuckled. "Told you I was going there, didn't I? I can't tell you what happened if you insist on doing all the talking. Did you give Rod the setup around Ramrod Ridge?"

Peters nodded. "Caliper told me the whole story, Nogales. You—we're really up against something, the way I figure it. But now I'm interrupting. What's the idea in changing horses?"

"Just about rode the hoofs off my pony, getting to Moonstone in record time," Nogales explained. "Didn't have the nerve to make him carry me back to you fellers again; figured he deserved a rest. So I borrowed this horse from Waco, while my horse was getting rested."

"But what did you go to Moonstone for?" Caliper demanded.

Nogales grinned. "What happened when I decided not to give Simon Crawford a check?"

"He got mad," Caliper said promptly. "Leastwise, you told me he did—him and the Deacon both."

"Exactly." Nogales nodded. "I told Crawford I'd give him cash money. Got that much clear?"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Caliper put in, his brow clearing. "I'm commencing to get it."

"Light always dawns if you wait long enough," Nogales said.

"Look," Caliper said excitedly, "here's how it it—Crawford knows you haven't thirty thousand cash on you, so he makes a guess that you'll go to San Rivedino to get it. Is that what you mean?"

"That's what I mean. Congratulations on your astute reasoning."

"And knowing Crawford like we do," Caliper ran on, "you figured he'd send the Deacon and some other riders to hold us up on the way home and relieve us of that thirty thousand."

"Right," Nogales said. "Besides the Deacon, there's ten other riders to be exact, waiting for us at Moonstone. I reckon they figure to make sure we pass through, and then follow us."

"You mean to say," Caliper exclaimed belligerently, "that Deacon Trumbull and a bunch of skunks are waiting in Moonstone to do a job on us."

Nogales nodded. "They're waiting in Moonstone, and I figure they're waiting for us—and that money you're totin'. Leastwise, they weren't doing missionary work when I saw 'em."

"YOU saw 'em?" Caliper's eyes widened. "What did they say to you?"

"They didn't see me. There's a back room in the rear of Waco Brown's saloon, where he sleeps. I got one of those Mex kids hanging around Moonstone to tip Waco I'd be waiting for him in his back room. Then I crawled through a window and waited.

"Waco showed up in a few minutes. He told me the Deacon and his pals had been asking if we passed through on the way to San Rivedino, but Waco told 'em he couldn't remember everybody who passed through. Howsomever, they're right sure we'll be coming back that way, with the money, and they're figuring to stay right in Moonstone until we show up."

"The dirty sidewinders," Caliper growled.

"They're all that," Nogales said quietly. "I got a peek at 'em through a crack in the rear wall, and they all looked right determined. I explained to Waco what I wanted. He fixed me up with this paint horse I'm riding. I'll change back to my own horse when we get there."

"Look here," Rod Peters proposed, "supposing when we get to Moonstone, I put this Deacon hombre and his pards under arrest?"

"On what charge?" Nogales asked.

"Plotting to rob and maybe kill you fellers," Peters replied.

Nogales shook his head. "Won't do. We haven't any actual proof of that. Besides they won't start anything right in Moonstone. They were figuring, no doubt, to get us after we left town."

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"I'm theenk we should ride hard for Moonstone," Steve said, his dark eyes gleaming. "The sooner we make the mix weeth them, the bettair."

Rod Peters looked thoughtful. "Maybe," he said, "it might be better to wait until the Deacon and his pards start something. Then I can make my arrests. In that way we won't need proof. Rather, we'll have the proof, through catching them red-handed."

"You got the idea." Nogales nodded. "Let's get going."

After a couple of preliminary bucks, Nogales got the paint pony straightened out and it caught up to the other three riders, who were impatiently holding their mounts down to a steady loping gait.

At the end of the three quarters of an hour, the riders approached Moonstone. Nogales checked his pony a trifle; the others did the same. Nogales said, "I've got the plan all worked out. Give me a couple of minutes start. I'll go ahead, tie this pony out back of Waco Brown's and enter his barroom by the rear. You three hit town together and head straight for Waco's place.

"Rod, you let Steve and Caliper enter by the front door, then you come along about five minutes later. By that time things should be boiling hot enough to give you all the proof needed to make your arrests."

Peters frowned. "I just don't like it, Nogales," he protested. "You going in the back way while Caliper and Steve approach those sidewinders by the front is all right. But there'll be eleven of them against you three. You'll be outnumbered, if they start anything in Waco Brown's place. If I wait five minutes, you might all three be wiped out. I'd better enter with Caliper and Steve."

"I see what you mean, Rod," Nogales said, "but I think we can stall 'em off until you get there. I've figured it out my way and knowing those hombres like I do, I figure the plan will work out all right."

Caliper put in, "If Nogales says it will work, Rod, it will work."

Peters gave in. "All right. You're the boss, Nogales."

"Thanks," Nogales replied. "Just give me a mite of headstart now, and when you fellers come in the front way, come with your Colts ready. Anyway you look at it, this is going to be tough going. We can't afford to take chances."

Nogales gave a brief wave of the hand and was off. Caliper and the other two riders watched anxiously, until he had disappeared beyond the first adobe shacks of Moonstone.

Then Caliper said grimly, "Come on, fellers, we don't want to leave him alone too long."

CHAPTER XV

BOYS IN THE BACK ROOM

THE three went tearing into the town, leaving clouds of dust in their wake. Three doors distant from Waco Brown's saloon, they pulled their ponies to a halt and flipped reins over the nearest hitch-rack. By this time, all three had whipped out their six-shooters. Their faces were tense.

Not far away, the railroad section hands stopped their work in amazement and straightened up to watch what was happening. Even the section boss forgot to curse his laborers, as he too stood in drop-jawed surprise. Suddenly it occurred to him that the situation looked dangerous. "Bullets due to be flying in a minute," he gasped, and dropped on his face behind a pile of railroad ties.

Unaware of this, Caliper was speaking swift words to his companions. "Better not wait five minutes after we enter," he said tersely to Peters. "Just give us a minute's start, then you come a-running. Come on, Steve!"

With Steve close at his heels, Caliper stepped lightly and swiftly in the direction of Waco Brown's saloon, the open doorway of which was just a few yards away by this time. Their guns were clutched tightly in right fists, thumbs bent across hammer prongs. At any instant they expected to hear the loud crash of exploding guns.

Suddenly, within three steps of the saloon entrance, Caliper stopped. "Wait," he whispered tensely to Steve, "I don't like the look of this. It's too quiet there. I can't even hear a voice. Maybe they've overpowered Nogales. Maybe they took Waco Brown captive and—Steve, we've got to move fast. Come on!"

They made a flying leap for the doorway.

Inside Waco Brown's saloon, Nogales was quietly drinking a bottle of beer at the bar and conversing with Waco Brown. There weren't any other customers in the bar. Both men were intently watching the entrance to the saloon.

The next instant, Caliper and Steve leaped inside the entrance, their faces hard and determined, the guns in their right hands ready to hurl death at anyone who barred their path. Then, seeing Nogales peacefully drinking at the bar, they stopped short, jaws dropping and guns slowly falling at their sides. At the same instant, Waco Brown and Nogales burst into howls of laughter.

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AS THE laughter roared out, Rod Peters came charging into the saloon, colliding with Caliper who was standing dumbfounded just in front of him. He too came to a sudden stop, then a silly grin spread on his features as he realized he'd been fooled.

"Run a whizzer on us, didn't you, Nogales?" he said sheepishly.

Nogales nodded, then went off into fresh peals of merriment. Caliper swore under his breath, then a grin twisted his features. After a moment, Steve started to chuckle. "Nogales, he make the rib on us, no?" he said.

"Dang you, Nogales!" Caliper growled good-humoredly, "I suppose you think it's funny to scare us half to death."

"Funny?" Nogales choked, tears coming to his eyes. "If you three could—could have"—a howl of laughter left his lips before he resumed—"seen the looks on your faces as you came boundin, all ready to sling lead—"

"I reckon the drinks are on us," Peters laughed.

"Waco don't keep vanilla, Caliper," Nogales said. "You need strong drink, anyway, after having a whizzer like this run on you."

Waco Brown grinned. "I can give you some real nice sarsaparilla pop, Caliper."

"Give me a bottle of beer," Caliper growled. Steve and Rod Peters lined up at the bar, looking sheepish, and gave their orders. From time to time, Nogales went off into fresh peals of laughter. "Gol-darn it!" Caliper looked reproachfully at Nogales, "You don't care how far you go, just so you can pull a joke on me, do you? S'help me, I'll get even. See if I don't. But what a sheepherdin', billy-be-damned liar you turned out to be. Telling us the Deacon and his gang was here."

"They are." Nogales wiped tears of laughter from his eyes. "I didn't lie about that. I saw 'em from Waco's back room, just like I told you."

"Aw," Caliper grumbled. "I wouldn't believe a word you say."

"If they were here," Peters asked, "what became of 'em?"

"They had too much to drink and passed out," Nogales told him.

Steve laughed and shook his head. "That one I'm not believe. I'm don't get fool' two times in one day."

"Ask Waco, if you don't believe me," Nogales advised.

"It's the truth," Waco Brown nodded. "They got pretty belligerent here, for a spell, and scared out all my regular customers. Then, a while later, they passed out, one by one."

"Where are they now then?" Caliper demanded.

"Sleeping it off in my back room," Waco said, laughing.

"T'hell you say!" Caliper exploded. He strode to the door leading to the back room and threw it open. Then he stopped short, staring in sudden amaement. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed.

Steve and Rod Peters had crowded close behind Caliper.

SPRAWLED on the floor of the back room in various attitudes of slumber, were eleven hard-boiled individuals, including Deacon Trumbull, Wedge Furlow, Ten-spot Nance and Limpy Bristol, snoring loudly.

But they didn't look hard-boiled now: Their mouths were open and their faces covered with sweat. The Deacon's plug-hat had rolled off and lay on its side near near his head which was pillowed on the legs of one of his companions. Snoring noises filled the stuffy room to mingle with the buzzing of flies.

"Cripes!" Caliper exclaimed in some awe. "Can you imagine such drunken sots? Phew! This room don't smell too sweet."

"It was some job lugging them in here," Waco Brown said. "I'd be much obliged if you fellers would help me cart 'em outside, where we can leave 'em back of my building, until they wake up."

"Why not leave 'em there until they come to and walk out of their own accord?" Rod Peters asked.

"I want to get to bed tonight," Waco said. "These hombres won't wake up until tomorrow morning, I'm figuring."

A suspicious light entered Caliper's eyes. He glanced quickly from Waco to Nogales. Suddenly he exclaimed loudly, "Drugstore! Mickey Finn!"

"You guessed it," Nogales chuckled. "That's what I visited that cheap drugstore for. I figured I could get knockout drops there. You see, I sort of figured Crawford might send a gang to wait for us here, so I got the Micky Finn dope while we were in San Rivedino, then rode here and passed the drops to Waco. Waco did his stuff and here we are—and here the Deacon and his gang are. Pleasant sight, isn't it?"

"Nogales! You devil!" Caliper exclaimed joyously.

"Wait a minute." Nogales started to laugh again. "Simon Crawford runs a general store. A general store is supposed to stock hardware. Suppose we furnish him a supply?"

Caliper let out a yell. "Pard, your head is really working. Waco, have you got a burlap sack?"

Waco produced a sack and the men collected from the snoring Deacon and his companions their guns and cartridge belts and dropped them into the sack. The armament made quite a hefty load.

Steve grinned, as he looked down on the sleeping men, "I'm bet this teach them the lesson not to dreenk, no?"

"C'mon," Nogales proposed, "let's cart these stiffs out back, then I'll exchange that paint pony for my own horse and we'll head back for Ramrod Ridge."

Ten minutes later the work was done and the men were once more in saddles. Waco Brown came out to the street to bid them goodbye. Nogales said seriously, "I hope when the Deacon and his crowd wake up, they don't get sore at you."

"They won't worry me any," Waco Brown said contemptuously. "In the first place, they'd have a tough time proving I put knockout drops in their drinks. In the second place, I've faced gangs just as tough."

He and Nogales shook hands. Nogales said, "I'm sure obliged, Waco."

"Hell's bells! I already owe you more than I can repay. I just wish I could be there, though, when you hand that sack of hardware to Simon Crawford."

"I'm figuring the look on Crawford's face should be good for a laugh," Nogales agreed. "Well, *adiós, amigo!*"

The riders headed their ponies out of Moonstone, across the desert, in the direction of Ramrod Ridge.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Tell Me about Tomorrow

The worst subway accident in forty years—and I was on the spot, with a cameraman

You know what Lobblies are? Well, nobody does exactly. They're shapeless and soundless and highly insubstantial; but you can't ignore them—not when they can turn destiny into a practical joke

By Nelson S. Bond

THE day Henry Mergenthwirker got out of the hospital was one of the red-letter days of my life. Or maybe it was just that I was viewing it through bloodshot eyes. At any rate, it started out with a dull, sickening thud and got steadily more nauseous.

To begin with, I woke about an hour and a half late to discover that sometime during the night the alarm clock had been turned off. Which was probably Japheth's doings. He was the laziest lobbly I never saw.

Later, when I went to rinse the dark taste of foreboding out of my mouth with coffee I had brewed while showering, I gulped, gasped and exhaled the stuff so violently that the walls of my kitchenette still look like a surrealist nightmare. Upon investigation I discovered that my favorite drip grind had been painstakingly spiked with a mixture of tobacco, chopped-up rubber bands, and slightly-used pencil shavings. And *that* was probably Henry's doings. He was the practical joker of the pair.

Finally, about five minutes after I'd sneaked into the private cubbyhole to which my label of assistant city editor entitles me, the boss came raging in with twin thunderclouds dangling where his eyebrows usually were.

"So, Hawley!" he snarled. "This is a fine time of day to be getting to work! Where have you been?"

"Well, you see, Chief," I said, "it was this way—"

"I don't believe you," he stated bluntly. "Hawley, I'm just about fed up with the way you've been acting. For the past six weeks you haven't been worth a damn around here as a newspaperman. The *World-News* isn't paying you to be ornamental. I made you assistant city editor because I thought you could produce. But you haven't. What's the reason?"

"Well, the main reason, Chief," I said apologetically, "is Mr. Mergenthwirker's lobblies."

"Well, you've got to snap out of it," he stormed. "I'm not going to stand much more of—*What!* Mr. Mergenwhozit's *whats?*"

"Lobblies," I repeated meekly. "You see, it all started about two months ago, Chief. About the time I scored that beat for our sheet on that Second National holdup—remember? This guy named Mergenthwirker came into my office with his two lobblies—"

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"Hawley—" The chief started twiddling the knife on the end of his watch chain ominously. "Have you been hitting the bottle? Lobblies! What are lobblies?"

There was only one answer to that. I did exactly what Mr. Mergenthwirker had done when I had asked him the same question weeks ago. I waggled my hand toward the corner of the room where I figured Henry and Japheth might be.

"They are," I said.

"They?" The boss stared around the room, then back at me cautiously. "Wait a minute, Len. Are you trying to tell me there's someone in this room besides you and me?"

"I'm not trying," I told him desperately. "I'm *telling*. There are two lobblies. Their names are Henry and Japheth. They belong to Henry Mergenthwirker, but I'm taking care of them because he was hurt in an accident and has been in the hospital for the past six weeks. They—they know things, boss."

THE chief's speculative look faded; he began looking grim instead. "Okay, Hawley," he snapped. "That'll do. So they know things, huh? Well, I know a few things myself. One of them is that when a man starts playing pussy-wants-a-corner with invisible wigglies it's time to take measures. I'll see you later."

The door banged and he was gone.

How long I sat there brooding and punching holes with a paper knife in the already pockmarked surface of my desk I don't exactly know. All I do know is that sometime later, as I was bawling out my two invisible companions, there came a faint rap on my door.

"Come in," I called wearily, and concluded my harangue. "And as for you two, the sooner Mergie comes back and claims you, the better I'm going to like it. I wish I'd never promised to take care of you in the first place. You've plagued me and deviled me and half driven me nuts, and now you're in a fair way to lose me a damn good job."

"Ex-excuse me, Mr. Hawley," said a mild, querulous little voice, "but who are you talking to?"

I whirled. "*Mergie!*" I shouted.

It was Henry Mergenthwirker. In the flesh and looking better than I'd ever seen him. Which wasn't saying much. He was a tiny wisp of a man, hardly more than five foot one, or maybe two, with sand-colored hair and eyes. A fidgety little twerp. His hands were constantly in motion, twisting in and out of pockets, fingering seams, fluttering like sun-struck butterflies. He smiled at me; a shy, embarrassed little smile.

"Hello, Mr. Hawley," he said. And again, "Who were you talking to?"

I said, "Man, you're a sight for sore eyes! Who? Why, to your lobblies, of course."

Mr. Mergenthwirker looked embarrassed. "But—but they're not here, Mr. Hawley. I left them out in the hall. They've been with me all morning. They knew I was going to leave the hospital today, you know, so they came down to greet me."

"They," I said, "knew."

"But of course. They always know everything. I—I thought you understood that, Mr. Hawley." And again he smiled, a shy smile of gratefulness. "I can't begin to thank you for taking care of them for me, Mr. Hawley. They say you've been awfully good to them while I was sick."

"Well, you can tell them for me," I snorted, "that the feeling's not mutual. They've just about ruined me as a newspaperman. And everything else. As a matter of fact, I'm about one hop-skip-and-jump ahead of a padded cell, and your lobblies are responsible."

Mr. Mergenthwirker sighed and twisted his fingers together like anxious pretzels. "I know just what you mean, Mr. Hawley. They *are* a trial sometimes. Especially Henry. But they mean well. It's just that they're lobblies and—Oh, you know how lobblies are."

"No," I told him. "I don't. Do you?"

"Well, they're just different," stammered Mr. Mergenthwirker. Then he brightened. "But now that I'm back, everything's going to be all right. And just to prove it, I'm going to have Henry and Japheth do something nice for you." He scurried to the door, opened it, shoved his head out, called: "Henry! Japheth! Come her, boys."

A MOMENT later he closed the door and stood staring fondly at what to me looked like a large chunk of ozone bounded on the south by floorboard, on the north by ceiling, and on the sides by an old filing cabinet and a few other assorted pieces of office furniture.

"They're really looking wonderful, Mr. Hawley," he said proudly. "You've taken marvelous care of them for me. Boys, did you like living at Mr. Hawley's apartment?"

He listened attentively, while I stood there wondering, as oft before, whether there were or were not such creatures as lobblies, and whether it was Mergenthwirker or I who was whacky. Then a sharp look of dismay crept into his eyes. He turned to me reproachfully. "Oh, Mr. Hawley, you really shouldn't have! Not in front of Henry, especially! He's so young!"

"How?" I puzzled.

Mr Mergenthwirker's pale cheeks flushed. "That—that young lady—" he hesitated. "Japheth seems to think perhaps she wasn't a lady at all! But"—he smiled benignly,—"that's over and done with now. I'm sure it won't happen again. Now how can the boys help you?"

I remembered then, suddenly, all the marvelous plans Mergenthwirker and I had cooked up before that unfortunate accident had dumped him in the hospital. It had been our intention to take advantage of the lobblies' uncanny power to predict events which were going to take place.

For a brief period I had seen visions of the easy riches headed for the pocket of anyone who could tell in advance which way the stock market was going to rise or dip, the results of baseball and football games, horse races. Now these dreams came flooding back on me a hundredfold. But they were tempered with another little thought. The boss had been making nasty cracks as he had left my office. Perhaps it would be smart to get in his good graces again before I went barging off on some cockeyed get-rich-quick scheme.

I suggested eagerly, "How about a red-hot news tip, Mergie? Something like that hammer killing they once told us about? If I could get a good story straight from the feed bag—"

"Well, Henry?" said Mr. Mergenthwirker. "Japheth?"

He listened to utter silence for a moment, his brows contracting. He looked startled. "*Really?*" he said. "Are you *sure?* Positive now? We mustn't make a mistake. Very soon, eh? Mr. Hawley"— He turned to me excitedly— "I think we have just the thing. Henry and Japheth say there is going to be a *terrible* subway accident in just a few minutes!"

I came to my feet like a Georgia colonel in a New York bus. "Subway accident!" I howled. "Where? When?"

Again Mergenthwirker listened intently. Then, "On the Eighth Avenue line," he repeated breathlessly, "this side of Twenty-eighth Street. An express is going to run clear off the track. A motorman and three passengers are going to be killed and fourteen people injured. Fire will break out and a city water main will be broken. It's going to be awful! And it's going to happen in a very few minutes!

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Henry says if we don't hurry it may happen before we have time to get there!"

"Then what are we waiting for?" I screamed. I shoved him out of the office by main force. As we charged through the city room, I collared Bill Maguire, who was peacefully snatching forty winks on *World-News* time.

"Come on, you poor excuse for a photographer!" I yelled. "Grab your box and a load of floodlights. We're going places."

Maguire brushed cobwebs away dazedly. "Whazzup?" he demanded. "Whazzamatta?"

"Don't bicker," I told him. "Come! We've got a date with a Pulitzer award."

WE GOT out of the *World-News* Building in about one thousandth of a second more time than it took us to drop eleven stories in the elevator. Fortunately, there is a subway kiosk outside the door. The only delay came as I was shoving Mergenthwirker before me through the turnstile.

He paused and looked back over his shoulder. "Mr. Hawley," he said, "Japheth says he doesn't know why you're going to all this trouble. He says—"

"Never mind Japheth!" I howled. "There's a train just pulling out. Run!"

We made it by the skin of our teeth. Or by the skin of my left leg, rather, for I had barely yanked that vital appendage through the closing doors when the express pulled out with a jerk. We stayed in the corridor so we could get out faster. As the train roared downtown to the fateful intersection, Bill Maguire demanded explanations. I offered as much as I thought necessary.

"We're on our way," I shouted over the rumble of the train, "to be eyewitnesses to a catastrophe with a capital *boom!* Don't ask me how I know. *I know!* You get that boogey-box of yours primed and ready to shoot. And make sure you've got plenty of flash bulbs. You'll probably need 'em—till the fire starts."

"Fire?" said Bill confusedly. "What fire? I don't see no fire."

"You will," I told him. "Well, now what, Mergie!"

Mr. Mergenthwirker looked worried. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hawley, but the boys *still* say they don't know why you're going to all this trouble. You see—"

"Skip it!" I demanded. "I know my business. Bill, we getting close?"

Maguire was watching the stations whisk by like ghost cities in the gloom. He nodded back at me. "You said Twenty-eighth, didn't you? We're almost there. A couple of seconds now. But darned if I can see anything—"

His words were drowned out by a metallic scream that almost tore the lid off my brain. There came a grinding roar, a jolt, and a crash that slammed us all to the floor. The harsh agony of shearing metal punctured our eardrums; the train beneath us seemed to quiver, rear, settle like a stricken monster. The lights flickered and went out. Human voices, lifted in panic, added to the confusion. Through the bedlam I heard Maguire bellowing at me profanely, "What the hell!"

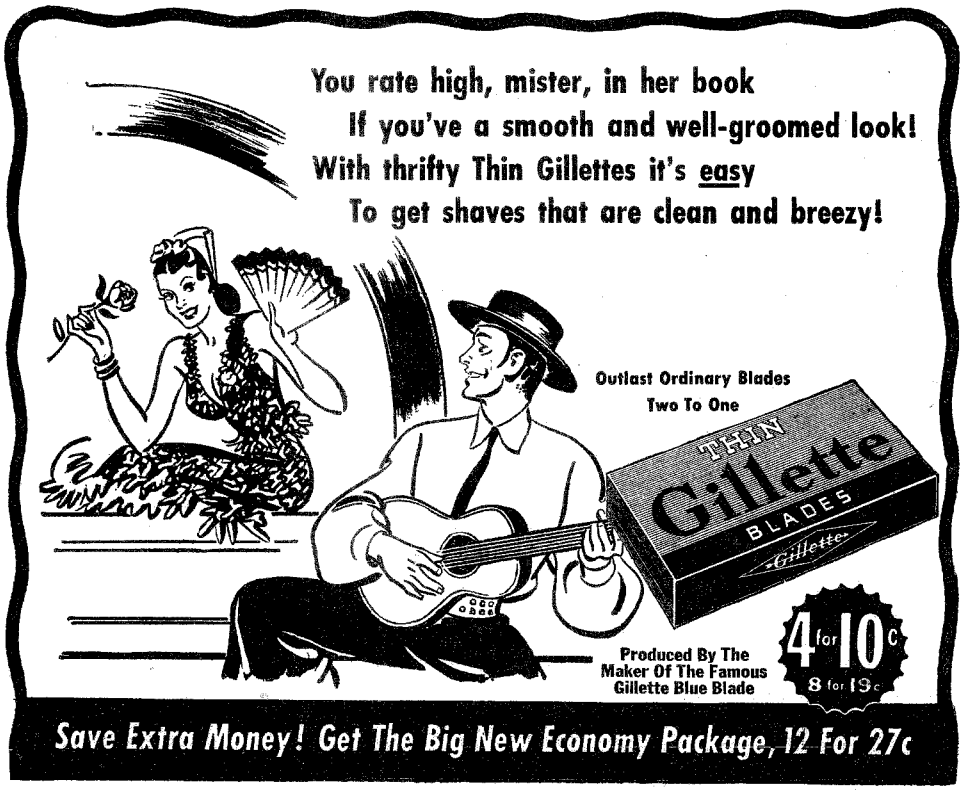
Then at my side, a piping reproof in the voice of Henry Mergenthwirker.

"But Japheth—that really wasn't nice! Why didn't you tell us this was the train that was going to crash?"

IT WAS lucky for us we had almost missed that train. Fortunately, we were in the last car, which was the best car to be in if you had to be there at all. How we managed to fight our way out of that car and down the track to a vantage point from which all of us could witness and Bill could shoot the scenes of that holocaust is more than I can tell you.

We did, though, and it was a mess. The worst accident in more than forty years, the company said later. The lobblies had their facts and figures right. Three people were killed and fourteen injured, six of them seriously. A water main burst. Fire broke out. That was what made it most dreadful. I still get the screaming meemies when I see those men, women, and kids fighting their way back up the tunnel beyond the reach of groping fingers of flame.

But I guess I'm not such a bad newspaperman after all. I got that story and I got it good; every last little detail of it. And Maguire got pictures that were worth a million bucks to whichever newspaper first dumped them on the street.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It was only when his last plate was exposed that the three of us—or maybe I should say the five of us—worked our way to the nearby local station. There I made a beeline for a telephone booth. But Mergenthwirker stopped me.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Hawley?" he asked.

"*Do?*" I howled. "What do you think I'm going to do? I'm going to call the office and turn in this story. It's terrific! Stupendous!"

"B-but, Mr. Hawley, it's no use!"

"No *what*?" I stared at him. "What do you mean, Mergenthwirker?"

"Why, I've been trying to tell you. But you wouldn't listen. Japheth says there's no sense in your turning your story in. You see—you don't work for the *World-News* any more."

"I don't work for—"

"Why, no. Japheth says your boss was awfully angry at you. He fired you a half hour ago. There's a note to that effect lying on your desk right now, and the business office has been notified."

It was right then and there that my heart did a leaping somersault with a half-gaynor. But not for the reason that Mergenthwirker supposed. I clutched the little man's shoulder fiercely. I said, "Mergie, you wouldn't lie to a guy, would you? This is straight? You're sure?"

"Yes, Mr. Hawley," said Mergenthwirker apologetically. We—the boys and I—we're awfully sorry we lost your job."

"Sorry!" I screamed deliriously. "Mergie, remind me to give each of the lobblies a great big kiss later on. But right now I've got something more important to do."

I dove for the telephone booth. A few seconds later I had the boss on the wire. He thought he had me over a barrel. When he heard my voice he said, "No, Hawley, it's no use. I've definitely made up my mind. You're fired; that's all there is to it. I don't want any arguments."

"You're getting one," I yelled back, "whether you want it or not. Shut that big yap of yours and listen for a minute! Do you know where I'm calling from? The subway station at the intersection of Twenty-eighth Street and Eighth Avenue."

"Well? What do I care where you're calling from?"

"At the moment," I informed him, "this happens to be *X* marking the spot of the biggest damn story in New York City. An express smashup with fire and blood all over everything!"

"What!"

"I'm standing here," I told him, "with an eye-witness account all ripe to be poured into a typer, and a filmpack full of pictures shot on the scene that no other sheet in this burg can duplicate! Now what was that you said about me being fired?"

"Look, Len," babbled he boss. "Look, Len, old boy, this is no time for kidding. Grab a taxi, son, and get up here as fast as you can. I'll tear out the front page and—"

"Maybe you will," I chortled, "and maybe you won't. You see, palsy, if I were on the payroll it would be my duty to turn this story in as a routine assingment. But by your own admission I've *fffft* with ye dear olde *World-News*. In which case I'm a free agent. And much as I hate to pass the bad news along—this story is going to cost you exactly five hundred bucks, plus two week's paid vacation, plus my old job back again!"

"Hawley," howled the boss, "damn your hide!"

"That," I said thoughtfully, "offends me. Seven-fifty might soothe me again."

The loud *pop* I heard over the phone was his heart breaking. He stopped raving and began pleading instead. "Len, boy, you can't do this to me and the *World-News*. Think of all we've done for you—"

"That's just what I'm thinking of," I retorted. "We'd better make it a grand."

That's when he surrendered.

"Okay, Len, you win. Five hundred, plus your job, plus a vacation. And now, for God's sake, man, get up here with that story!"

SO THAT was that. But I guess you know I didn't bust up housekeeping with the lobblies like I'd sworn I was going to. Not after that affair. Instead I made a proposition to Mergenthwirker.

"Listen pal," I said. "You haven't any place to go since you got out of the hospital. And I'm a lonely bachelor. I think the only thing for you to do is come on over and share my diggings with me. What say?"

Mergie smiled gratefully. "Why, that's awfully nice of you, Mr. Hawley," he said. "But you really didn't have to ask, you know. I moved my bags over into your apartment early this afternoon."

I stared.

"You—you *did?*"

"Why, yes. You see, Henry and Japheth told me you were going to ask me to move in with you. So I thought I might as well save time."

Well, what are you going to do with a trio like that? People who know all the answers before you even ask the questions. I just stared at him dumbly. And I gues maybe even Mergie was a little bit embarrassed, because he wriggled and twisted. His hands flew from pocket to pocket like a pair of homeless hummingbirds, and he smiled at me shyly.

"Anyhow," he said, "We're very grateful, Henry and Japheth and I." And, "Thank you! Thank you, very much!" said Mr. Mergenthwirker.

ROMEOS

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Give Me Ten Men

Tip straightarmed, and he heard the body strike the ground as he feinted and spurted ahead

By Charles Marquis Warren

Here's the most thrilling, most satisfying pro football story of the year—about a warhorse who was whipped by himself

TIP HOLLBROOK, once the star back for the SPARTAN'S, is on his way to the bottom in professional football. It's his ankle—he thinks—that is keeping him on the sidelines and in the lower pay brackets this year.

But, LYNN, his beautiful and extravagant wife, has a different diagnosis. On the day of the game with Brooklyn, she tells Tip brutally that he is washed up, a has-been, and that his ankle has nothing to do with it.

LANCE ELLENGER, owner of the Spartans, is now taking Lynn places, giving her expensive presents: she admits that; and she taunts Hollbrook with the knowledge that he is kept on the team at all only because of her friendship with Ellenger.

Tip sees only one happy way out of pro football: a job that he might have at the McDowell School in Maryland, teaching Ancient History and coaching the team. But the school is particular about its faculty, and has no use for Tip while he is in debt to the extent of seven thousand dollars—debts run up by Lynn's demands.

Tortured by a sense of frustration, by anger and jealousy and concern about his ankle, Tip is sent into the game in the last quarter, with Brooklyn winning. Running behind the interference of SONNY TALBOT, his old teammate at Atlantic University, he carries the ball forty yards before fumbling it—another ghastly failure. But Marchant, the Spartan center, falls on the ball over the line for a touchdown, and Ellenger's team wins.

AS TIP walks off the field, unnoticed by Lynn, a copper-haired girl runs up and embraces him, congratulating him on his part in the game. Though Tip does not know the girl, she seems to know all about him, all about his brilliant career at Atlantic University. She asks him, as a special favor, to see her that night—and to talk about himself.

Lynn hears this, and in a fit of jealousy coldly tells the girl—who calls herself MARION PARKER—that Tip is joining Ellenger's party tonight. On an impulse Tip asks the girl to come along; and Ellenger, strongly attracted to her, confirms the invitation.

The celebration is at the Aster House, a new and expensive night club. Champagne is provided in huge quantities; and as the party goes on Tip begins to relax in an enjoyment of Lynn's jealousy. But a sudden gesture of Lynn's makes clear that she is jealous of Ellenger because of Marion Parker.

And when Tip hears Ellenger say: "Take Tip. He belongs to me. I don't need him. But I carry him—like a warnout car"—Tip rises drunkenly to his feet, breaks up the party, and assumes the check. It amounts to a hundred and sixty dollars; and Tip has about three dollars in his pocket.

The girl stays after the others have left, and offers to help. She confesses that she has cherished a hero worship for Tip from his college days, when her in-

This two-part serial began in the Argosy for November 29

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terest had first been aroused by her brother Bill's admiration for the great Hollbrook.

Bitterly, unwilling to forget that he is a failure, Tip repulses her. And to discharge his debt to the Aster House he accepts the proposal of LOUIE CHAMBLIS, who runs the place, that he work it out—cleaning, doing women's work. . . .

CHAPTER VII

THE HEEL AND THE ANKLE

THE Wednesday night following Thanksgiving the Spartans scored up and then outfought the mighty Chicago Bears.

Forty-five thousand fans in Spartan Park witnessed the stocky figure of Cal Gillette return one of Kavanaugh's punts sixty yards through the entire Chicago team to tie the score at six-all midway in the third quarter.

Andy McKinney, taking no chances, sent Tip in to add the extra point and put the Spartans out in front 7 to 6. It was the first game he had entered for three weeks. He returned to the bench immediately, but had the satisfaction of seeing his one point loom larger and larger until it became the deciding score of the game.

It gave him a warm feeling when, at the after-game jubilance in the clubhouse, his part in the triumph was widely discussed.

He saw little of Lynn. Once a week he left her allowance at the hotel desk; but he had ceased to leave notes of apology or condemnation with it. There had been no answers.

He had moved to a smaller and less expensive hotel where the players who were unmarried or did not share apartments with other players lived and congregated. He was able to save a little this way, but Louie Chamblis would not hear of his paying off bit by bit.

"What would you live on?" Louie asked. "You permit someone to take your wife but I will not be the one to take your money."

"Where'd you hear about my wife?"

"Those things get around, Mr. Hollbrook. You cannot conceal things like that."

"You leave her out of it."

"With pleasure, Mr. Hollbrook." The enlarged eyes twinkled with good humor.

He took a certain amount of pride in his job. On several occasions Marion Parker came in and talked with him while he worked. She followed him about the place as he manipulated the vacuum cleaner, pointing out the elegance and beauty he had missed.

Once he switched off his vacuum and looked at her, and then asked irrelevantly, "Would you get a kick out of an old mud-brick wall if you knew it had once been covered with rubies, gold, chalcedony and every precious stone known to the East three thousand years ago?"

She looked at him, flushing faintly.

"Where would a wall like that be?"

"Outside of Baghdad, west of the Gate of Ishtar, not so very far from Babylon and Damascus."

He watched her closely to see if she thought he was kidding her.

She looked back at him, levelly, smiling.

"I'd probably love it. I wouldn't know much about it, but you sound as if you could teach me and it sounds exciting."

"It is. I'd like to tell about it first hand in a course in ancient history one of these days."

THE following Sunday in Detroit he watched the Spartans put up a thrilling battle with Potsy Clark's bruising hell-for-leather Lions.

Three minutes after the start of the second period, Captain Sandy Sanders blocked one of Bill Shepherd's kicks and Stoker Marchant fell on the ball on Detroit's thirty-seven. The big crowd settled in onimous silence and waited to see what would happen.

Two passes and a tricky triple reverse netted nothing; and on the Spartan bench Andy McKinney jerked his chin toward the huddle and said, "Hollbrook, go in there and kick one."

The kick wouldn't be difficult as far as distance was concerned; but the angle was sharp, almost acute.

Sonny Talbot, jogging in beside Tip, said, "Let's cross up those Detroits and run it. They'll never expect you to run."

"You heard Andy. We're going to kick one."

"Okay. But it'll need a rudder to get around that corner."

The snap from Marchant was low. It bobbled from Sonny's fingers and he stabbed at it on his knees, scooped it up, jumped to his feet and flipped it to Tip.

"Let's go, Tip!"

There were the words, the old words.

Following Sonny, he started out wide around the right end, taking in his breath deeply for a long run, calculating distance and letting his eye run quickly over the field to chart the best course.

At the line of scrimmage his straightarm darted out like the tongue of a snake and he got by, spinning and executing a neat pivot. Four yards farther along Sonny went down under two converging Lions and his "Take it along, Tip!" was a muffled exhortation.

He slowed to shift his field and he felt a hand grasp his right ankle from behind and turn it. He kicked the hand away, and as he did so he realized that Lynn had been right: he was no longer in the same league with these boys. Not with his ankle.

And suddenly he became aware of the pain there. Instinctively he slowed to favor it. More hands touched him from behind, and abruptly he was caught under an avalanche of bodies that smelled of sweat and silk.

He lay until the weights upon him unscrambled and then got up slowly. In the quiet that followed while the head linesman and referee measured to see if it was a first down, the team drew off by itself, leaving Sonny and Tip standing near the ball.

The referee jerked his hand to point in the direction of the Spartan goal posts.

"First and ten, Detroit." The loudspeaker amplified the news to the crowd and there was a great roar of relief.

Swede Larsen and a back named Jordan were coming onto the field. Jumping Joe walked over and said, "You pulled that one once, Father Time. You think you'd star again?"

Tip and Sonny moved off the field and Tip sat down on the bench and loosened the laces of his right shoe. It was queer how that ankle wouldn't stand up for one minute's running.

Andy McKinney stood over him.

"You're too old a hand to pull that twice in one season. My orders were to kick."

"My gosh," Sonny said. "Didn't none of you guys see me bobble that snap from center?"

Out on the field Whizzer White had found the range. He fired three beauties to Bill Shepherd and then from the twelve Dwight Sloan crossed up the Gold on a sneak to the right side and ran over untouched. The Whizzer added the point neatly.

. . . On the plane flying back that night Tip felt the isolation more keenly. The players weren't subtle about it. He could hear Jumping Joe's voice lamenting to Andy McKinney that the team would have to struggle along

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without counting further on any of Father Time's famous long runs unless the club chipped in and provided him with a pair of crutches.

There was a lot of laughter at that. The club was in high spirits. In the second half Jumping Joe and Swede Larsen had found their driving powers and battered their way to a well-earned 12 to 7 victory over the Lions. It gave them a sense of being indomitable.

Tip shut their voices from his ears, closing his eyes. He was very, very tired. He began to think of Lynn, wondering what she and Ellenger would be doing tonight—and went to sleep on the thought.

IN THE end it was Jumping Joe Harmon's incessant ragging that got him. One day in the dressing room after practice he slugged it out with the big youngster, landing a roundhouse right to Harmon's jaw that knocked him off his feet and catapulted his head against a corner of a locker.

The gash in Harmon's head required eight stitches and prevented him from playing in the return game with the Green Bay Packers, which the Spartans managed to win 10 to 7 in a drizzling snow.

The Saturday following the incident of the fight Andy McKinney told him he needn't bother dressing for Sunday's game with Pittsburgh at the local park.

It made the anger in Tip surge to a crest.

"They're not playing me," he told Marion Parker when she made one of her frequent morning visits to the Aster House; "but they're not fooling me. Lance is punishing me for damaging his prize Harmon. And Andy's feeling out every club in the league to see if he can't make a trade. He's burning up the phone and he's finding none of the clubs wants me."

"How's your ankle, Tip?"

"What ankle?" He glared at her.

She smiled. "It really doesn't bother you, does it? So much?"

"Attitudes are what bother me."

"Do you feel like you can still go, Tip?"

He said angrily, "Give me a team that believes in me and I could hand 'em the championship on any kind of a dish they pick."

She looked at him appraisingly, her eyes thoughtful.

"I believe you. That's the first sign of the old Tip I've heard."

"It isn't really true," he amended. "I just get sore." But he felt better. He took her hand. A grin smoothed out the frown of his lips.

"You can make me feel like I've still got something. You're pretty nice."

She withdrew her hand. She wasn't smiling. She said very slowly, "No, I'm not. I'm pretty much of a heel."

CHAPTER VIII

GUEST OF DISHONOR

HE DIDN'T go out to the park for the game. He debated going over to Ebbets Field and watching Brooklyn handle the Philadelphia Eagles. It wouldn't be much of a game but he might run into Tad Cody and that would be a treat.

First, he decided, he'd pick up Marian Parker. When he had finished dressing he called down for the time. It was after twelve. He and Marion Parker would have time for lunch.

There was a knock on the door and Lynn came in.

Well!" he said. He hadn't seen her for several weeks. Now, for some reason he couldn't explain, he felt annoyed that she had interrupted him.

"You don't look very glad to see me, Tip."

"I have an appointment."

She took off her hat, shaking her hair loose, and sat on the rumpled bed.

"I have news for you," she said, smiling.

"What?"

"Lance is giving you another chance."

He stared at her.

"You mean he thinks he might need me against those Redskins next week. That's the only reason he'd give me another chance."

"It isn't football, darling. You're through in football. Even you must finally admit that."

He let it go; they'd fought it out before.

"What are you talking about—another chance?"

"Lance is going to let you take over the managership of the Aster House, darling."

"He's what?"

"Your salary will be two hundred a week. Louie Chamblis reported that you were a 'fine big fellow', capable and willing to work and that you fitted into the business and he liked you."

"Is Louie quitting?"

"He's being fired, darling."

"Fired? Louie runs the Aster House."

"Of course, darling. Runs it for Lance. Lance owns it; Louie manages it for him. You see?"

He didn't see. He looked at her.

"Why is Ellenger firing Louie?"

"Louie is very sharp, darling. Lance has often told me he suspects Louie of holding back on the returns."

"Louie wouldn't do a thing like that."

"It doesn't matter whether he would or would not, really. The point is, you'll have a respectable job—"

"That pays two hundred a week. That interests you, doesn't it?"

"Don't be dull, Tip."

"Certainly it does. But you can quit barking, Lynn; you've got the wrong tree."

He got his overcoat and went to the door.

"You can tell your Lance Ellenger I don't want any part of his Aster House if it means moving in on Louie Chamblis."

Through the angry film on her eyes she looked at him.

"I can have you fired from the Spartans for this."

"I don't doubt it for a minute. I think you'll do your best—unless Ellenger decides he needs me for those Redskins."

He went out, closing the door.

IT WAS early yet; the Brooklyn-Philly game wouldn't start for another hour. He took a bus to Marion Parker's apartment. She wasn't in; and this brought a distinctly unpleasant shock. It occurred to him how much he had come to count on her being around.

He found a small restaurant down the street and spent the afternoon waiting, phoning her place, trudging at intervals up to her apartment only to find that she did not answer the buzzer.

At five-thirty he heard a sports program announce that Brooklyn had swamped Tad Cody's Philly Eagles. It was the end of the program and he did not hear the rest of the scores.

At six-thirty he bought a paper and found that the Spartans had massacred the Pittsburgh Steelers 40 to 12. The Spartans were hot, he thought; they'd give that championship Washington outfit what-for next week if they didn't cool off. But the Washingtons had pasted the Chicago Bears 33 to 7. It didn't look so encouraging for the Spartans after all.

At seven o'clock, feeling sour and very lonely, he went

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out on the street to give her apartment a last try, and saw her going up the steps into her building.

"Where on earth have you been, Tip?" her clear voice asked as he came running up. "I've been trying to get you ever since the Brooklyn-Philly game ended."

"I've been waiting for you all afternoon. That's where I wanted to take you."

"Will you come in with me? I've arranged a party—in your honor, so to speak. There are two people I want you to meet. They're very anxious to see you."

In the fourth floor hallway she stood watching him, poised with the key in her hand, her eyes solemn.

"What's the matter, Tip?"

"Nothing."

"No. Something's wrong."

"I couldn't find you."

She turned the key in the lock, hiding her face; then she straightened.

"Missing me isn't what's wrong. Is it Lynn?"

"Haven't I got a right to miss you?"

"No."

He considered this. It was true. He said, "Maybe this will do for a reason. My long and sometimes honorable career as a Spartan is to be terminated. I have it unofficially that I'm to be fired."

She searched his face quickly.

"The people in here will be very glad to see you," she said, pushing open the door.

Her apartment was comfortably furnished, the way he would have liked. It looked cozy with the fire burning crisply under the old-fashioned mantlepiece.

A man was leaning against the mantlepiece; a tall young man with a thin pleasant face and bespectacled eyes. At the sound of the door opening he turned around, and when he took a step forward you saw that he was crippled.

"Tip!" He grinned broadly and took another halting step forward. "Tip Hollbrook, you old warhorse!"

IT WAS that limp which drew Tips' concentration, sent his mind trudging back to the campus of Atlantic University, to the classmate whose legacy had been football, whose heart and mind and soul had been football—but whose body had not.

"Bill," Tip said. He grinned his pleasure. "Bill Cody!"

"My brother," the girl said.

Tip turned and looked at her.

"Bill Parker Cody," she said. "We both have it for a middle name. Mother's family name. Mine is Marion Parker Cody."

A voice behind him said, "You've lost weight, Tip," and he turned.

"Tad," he said. "Tad!"

Tad Cody's long legs sprawled easily from the morris chair. The reflection of the fire chased bright shadows to and fro across his bald head. His wide mouth was parted in a grin.

"Tad," Tip repeated. It was all he could think of to say. He went over and shook the lanky man's hand and kept shaking it, getting his bearings. Then, to cover his confusion, he said, "You took one hell of a licking today."

Tad Cody shrugged.

"I've never maintained a coach was any better than his material," he said blandly.

"Sit down," Bill Cody said. "Sit down, you old warhorse. We're glad to see you."

It came rushing back now, all of it. Like the forgotten words of a remembered tune. Tad Cody in his comfortable living room in his house just off the campus, planning next week's attack against Fordham with Tip after study hours were over. Bill Cody, on the honor roll and not having to study much, listening to the words of captain and warrior with a worshipful, wistful look and an intensity that was pitiful.

Glimpses of a long-legged, shyly awkward girl in her early teens who peered at intervals through the hallway curtains and made no sound.

"Tip says he won't be with the Spartans any longer," Marion Parker Cody said. She was looking at him worriedly.

Tad Cody grinned. "That's fine."

"That's better than fine," Bill Cody said, beaming.

"How's Sonny?" Tad Cody asked.

"He's going great. He's got a lot left."

"I want you with the Phillies," Tad Cody said. "I'm prepared to make you an attractive offer. My owners, bless their slow-minded souls, have at last seen the light."

TIP stared. He looked at their faces. His glance caught the girl's and held on. He kept his face impassive.

She said, "An explanation is due you."

"Don't bother."

"The only explanations needed I'll furnish," Tad Cody said. "At the beginning of last year my club owners told me they'd hired me to get them a winning season. I looked over the club and told them they'd have done better to hire some new material. They instructed me to do what I could with the stuff at hand and they'd see what could be done later. We haven't won a game so far this season."

His blue eyes watched Tip.

"The owners came to me midway in the schedule. They were convinced. They said go out and get a winning club for next year and we'll pay its way. And that's how it is. I'm going to get a winning club."

Bill Cody said, "And he couldn't have a winning club without you."

"Me? You're thinking in terms of eight years ago."

"You're still the best back I ever saw," Tad Cody said.

"You haven't seen me lately."

"No, but Marion has."

"I've slowed up. I've been around a long time." He felt his breath tighten inside his chest, seeming to slow down the beat of his heart. There wasn't any sense in becoming enthusiastic about this. These were his friends. The men were.

"I've picked up a bad ankle in the wars," he said.

"So," continued Tad Cody, "the first thing I did was ask them to buy you. They balked at that. They knew McKinney was trying to trade you. They think you're finished. But Marion tells me she thinks it's because of the attitude of your club. So I asked my owners to gamble with me and they agreed."

"Gamble?"

Tad frowned slightly.

"We're closing our schedule with an important game. With you in there I think we could give a better account of ourselves. We couldn't win but it might be that the owners would consider taking you on next year at the salary I want to pay you."

"What's that?"

"Seven thousand dollars. I know you're in debt that much. Marion investigated."

Tip looked intently at his hands.

"There wasn't much she overlooked, was there?" he said softly.

MARION came and sat suddenly on the rug beside him. The heat of the room had flushed her face, making it warm and glowing. She put both her hands on one of his and held it.

"You think I've been rotten, Tip. A spy. Deceiving you, exploiting you."

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"No." He didn't look at her. "I thought it was for another reason."

Suddenly she smiled. He could feel the pressure of her fingers. Relief was on her face.

"I meant everything I've said. Everything." She nodded vigorously as if to prevent any disbelief on his part.

"You can blame me," Tad Cody said equably. Then he smiled. "Although Marion wasn't noticeably reluctant to take on the job. She had to find out for me whether you still had it. She had to find out about that ankle trouble we've been hearing about. Find out how you were mentally; whether or not you still had your confidence.

"All these items were important to me. I've got to have a winning club. If I had come to you directly, or if she had asked you right out, you'd have sold yourself for everything you were worth—injuries or not. I wouldn't blame you. Any footballer would. But I couldn't take that chance with my career hinging on just one season—next year. So that's how and why we did it. It wasn't her fault."

Marion Cody squeezed Tip's fingers.

"I reported I thought you'd be an excellent investment," she said.

He stood up, letting her hand slip from his. He knew if he put too much thought behind his words he wouldn't go through with it. These were his friends. It would have been different selling himself to another club.

"I haven't," he said slowly, "been able to play on my ankle without it giving way since the season began. It's worse now than it ever has been. I wouldn't be good for five minutes in that game of yours."

Tad Cody was lighting his pipe. He said around its stem without lifting his eyes, "Is that how it is?" and he said it softly.

"Yes."

Marion walked with him to the hall, stepped out and closed the door behind her. Suddenly her words burst from her in a hot torrent of shame and hurt.

"I'm glad we won't have you with us, Tip Hollbrook! At first I thought if your old confidence could be restored—and it could have been with a team around you that believed in you—you'd be again the Tip Holbrook we knew at Atlantic. But you never will and I know that now!"

She took a step away from him.

"You're wallowing in self pity. You admit you're licked because the person you put on a pedestal threw you away—made you believe you were finished, incompetent, inferior. And instead of fighting out of it you accepted it and believed it and your pride was so hurt that you blindly blamed it on an imaginary injury to your ankle.

"You're physically sound, Tip Hollbrook, and you and I know it; but you've quit because you were told by someone you loved that you couldn't make any more big money and therefore were a failure."

She took hold of the doorknob, her eyes wet with a glisten of defiance and hurt.

"Your kind has no right to play for Tad. I don't ever want to see you asking him to take you on. You see, I'm ashamed too."

The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER IX

ONE MAN ALONE

MONDAY when he entered the clubhouse he found his locker empty. The players, in various stages of dress, nodded to him, a trifle self-consciously, he thought.

Andy McKinney came over and said, "Sorry, Tip. You're closed out. You're through. The boss's orders."

"Where is he? I'll see him."

McKinney cleared his throat in rough embarrassment. "I . . . wouldn't, Tip. He's out with—that is, he's—"

"I see what you mean." There was no pang of jealous hurt now. Only a sting of anger and humiliation. He turned to go.

McKinney said, "He left this for you," and handed him a check for a hundred and seventy-five dollars. "It's a week's salary and a hundred bucks for—uh—notice, he said."

He started to refuse it; but a gallant gesture wouldn't help pay off Louie Chamblis. He took the check. "Thanks."

McKinney's face was red.

"You been with us a long time," he said.

Tip felt the warm flush of the years when he had been great pour into his mind. Now he was receiving a hundred bucks for notice.

"Yeah," he said. He went out the door.

. . . He waited until the bar closed at the Aster House before entering by his customary back way, then he went directly to Louie Chamblis' office.

Louie looked up with no surprise from his great desk, and handed him an oblong strip of paper. It was a check for eighty-eight dollars.

"You're fired, Mr. Hollbrook. This is for two weeks' notice and two weeks due you. You've worked ten weeks, for two of which you were entitled to pay."

His great eyes concentrated on Tip's collar. Louie was embarrassed.

Tip said, "I know how it is, Louie. I know Ellenger fired me." He watched the brief surprise in the enlarged eyes.

"And I think you should know that Ellenger offered me your job. He thinks you are cheating him. He doesn't think I'm smart enough to chisel on him. He thinks you're skinning him out of this place."

Louie's face was expressionless. After a moment he said, "And you would not accept my job?"

"Hell, I couldn't run this joint. It takes a man with the feelings of a fish, like you, Louie, to put a place like this over." He grinned at the other.

Louie nodded.

"My instincts never default. You are a very honest big bum, Mr. Hollbrook."

He went to his desk.

"I own a share of the Aster House. The smaller share, to be sure. But Ellenger cannot evict me if I am aware. And now I am aware. I also have lawyers, not so high priced, but just as shrewd. It is nice to know that I am suspected of chiseling."

He smiled then at Tip.

"Thanks, Mr. Tip Hollbrook, for letting me know how I stand. You are a fine big fellow, Mr. Hollbrook."

HE COULD not get in touch with Marion Parker. He gave up finally and spent the latter part of the week lolling in bed, catching up with a rest he hadn't known he needed so desperately.

On Sunday he took a train down to Washington for the Redskin game. He didn't know why. He supposed it was like a retired sea captain's journey to the harbors to watch the movements of ships he was no longer a part of. Something like that.

He had a seat on the twenty-yard line and he watched the pre-game warm ups with interest.

As the teams lined up for the kickoff someone dropped heavily into the seat beside him.

"They got the field nearly swept clean of snow," Sonny Talbot observed.

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Tip said hesitantly, "I thought—if Tad has room for a guy with two good feet and a will to use 'em . . ."

"What are you doing here?"

"Watching. Same as you. The air here don't smell so bad as on that bench."

"Listen, if you've quit your job on account of—"

"I didn't quit. I sort of got canned. Me and Mr. Ellenger had a little run-in. I guess I was a bit frank telling him he couldn't buy championships when he didn't have sense enough to hold on to a champion, and he got mad and—"

"You damned fool." He felt a little lumpy in his throat. "How much money have you?"

"Plenty."

"How much?"

"Well, coming down here took a little. I got twelve dollars."

"That's fine. That's just dandy."

Sonny beamed all over.

Two and a half hours later they left Griffith Stadium, having witnessed a ding-dong, battling scoreless tie that left the crowd in hysterics and the Spartans in position where they needed one more decision before they could lay claim to the Eastern championship.

Tip took a double room in the hotel and persuaded Sonny to move in with him. He felt a direct responsibility for the big guy's predicament but he knew better than to mention it.

Once he called at Marion Cody's apartment and learned from the superintendent that Miss Parker had gone to Philadelphia for the remainder of the week. He should have known that, he thought; Sunday's game in Spartan Park meant everything to the Cody family.

DESPITE the coating of ice on the seats and the penetrating bite of cold in the night air there were nearly sixty thousand people in the park by game time. They had turned out more as a tribute of appreciation than because the game with the Phillies had any promise of interest.

Tip found his seat and Sonny Talbot, sitting beside him, put up his paper quickly and said, "Seen tonight's paper?"

"No. Why?"

Sonny said quickly, as if hurrying away from the subject, "No reason. Boy, I wouldn't want any part of that ground tonight. It's frozen. Bones break when they connect with that kind of turf."

Andy McKinney had started the Spartan reserves. The Redskins, overconfident and suffering from a letdown after last week, had done no better than a tie with the Detroit Lions in Washington during the afternoon, thereby clinching the eastern division title for the Spartans.

It was justifiable, Tip thought, that McKinney should preserve his first string at the expense of the crowd's enjoyment tonight.

The Eagles made headway against the reserves. They employed solid, sensible football, a lot of power dependent upon hard and efficient blocking rather than split-second timing.

"Baby," Sonny said gleefully, "do those plays take me back!"

The Eagles, Tip saw, were using plays that were only slight derivations of the remembered Atlantic system; and

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they brought a nostalgia to Tip as he watched. But it was evident they were wearing themselves out. If by any chance they became genuinely annoying the Spartan regulars would come in and annihilate them.

Three minutes before the end of the half they surged close enough to the Spartan goal for Smukler to boot a field goal for three points.

And one play after the ensuing kickoff Andy McKinney sent the first string in and the crowd gurgled with a mixture of delight and pity.

When the half ended the Spartans led 7 to 3 and were four yards away from another touchdown.

They watched the Eagles trudge wearily to the clubhouse. "I wish," Sonny said finally, "I could get out there and help them. I been waiting for years, it seems, to dish a little to that Harmon and that Larsen."

"Why don't you?"

"I'd be a big help. All I can do is block for you. I never scored a touchdown in my life. I don't believe I ever carried a ball more than a dozen times."

"You could help keep the score down. That's important to Tad."

Sonny looked at him intently, color flooding his knobby cheeks. "They're going to beat hell out of Tad," he said. "You think you could—"

Tip shook his head.

"It would seem like old times, you and me and Tad." Sonny grinned resolutely, as if a decision had been reached in his mind. "I'm going, Tip. I'm going out there and raise hell!" And he was running down the aisle steps and disappeared among the crowd surrounding the nearest exit.

There was a hollowness at the pit of Tip's stomach, an aching hollowness. He picked up Sonny's paper from the empty seat, cursorily paged through it, stopped and stared at a picture on the third page of section one. It showed Lynn in a leopard-skin coat and cap to match standing with a stewardess beside the silver body of an air transport.

The caption read: *Football Widow Leaves for Reno.* He scanned the brief column quickly, phrases catching his eye:

. . . asserting the erstwhile star neglected her continuously . . . would not acknowledge his career in football was terminated . . . desertion, grounds of nonsupport. . . .

Only the last paragraph stood out for him:

When asked about Mr Lance Ellenger, owner of the Professional Football Spartans, with whom she has frequently been seen, Mrs. Hollbrook remained smilingly noncommittal.

Tip felt a sudden pounding of blood in his ears. It was as if some mysterious presence had suddenly released him from the obligations of the last two years: from the job of living up to a luxurious and false standard he hated and could not afford; from the grip of a situation that made him furnish excuses because he could not risk slipping naturally, could not afford to fade without an alibi.

He stood up, and the suffocating weight of the last two years seemed to drop from him.

CHAPTER X

TAKE IT, SONNY!

THERE was a Pinkerton man outside the clubhouse door beneath the bleachers and he did not recognize Tip. He said genially, "You can't get in here now, bud."

"Tell Dad Cody that Tip Hollbrook wants to see him. He'll let me in."

"What do you want, Tip?"

He swung around. Seated on the rail of one of the turnstile gates was Marion Cody. Her hands were thrust into the pockets of her fur coat.

"I want to see Tad."

"He's still busy."

He went over to her, his face flushing faintly.

"I thought—if Tad has room for a guy with two good feet and a will to use 'em, maybe he could see his way clear to . . ." His words trailed off awkwardly.

A sudden eagerness invaded the frown of her face. She asked no questions. She stepped down from the rail.

"It's all right," she said to the Pinkerton man. She touched Tip's shoulder, her eyes bright. "Luck," she said.

He went inside, conscious of her eyes following him.

Tad Cody was talking to Sonny Talbot. They were alone. Sonny had on an Eagle uniform.

"You got a uniform to fit me?" Tip asked softly.

A grin broke over Sonny's face as he stared.

"You son of a gun! You last-minute son of a gun!"

Last minute. A chill blackness closed over Tip suddenly. Not shame now, but the realization that he couldn't do this after all. Now that he'd made his mind up, it was too late.

"Skip it, Tad," he said. "I'd—we'd forgotten. They won't let you play Sonny and me without—"

"*You* skip it, youngster." Tad's grin spread from ear to ear now. "You think I wouldn't figure on a thing like that? Shucks, I registered you and Sonny both before the deadline, just in case. I never thought you'd let me down."

"Man!" Tip took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Get me into that uniform, mister!"

. . . While he was dressing, Tad brought in a string of players. O'Brien, Smukler, and the other backs; Don Looney, left end; Carter, right end; Moose Harper, center and captain. They were tired but they grinned.

"They're anxious to get a look at the best back I ever saw," Tad Cody said. "They don't think he exists."

Big Moose Harper smiled and said, "If you can get the hang of the numbers we'll show 'em something, Tip."

"I've told Davey to run nothing but Atlantic stuff," Tad Cody said. "And Tip will remember."

The players nodded at Tip almost shyly as they filed out. Davey O'Brien called, "We'll be waiting for you, guy."

FIVE minutes after the fourth quarter began, he asked Moose Harper to take time out. There was such a blinding pain in his right ankle as he had never known; and there was nothing imaginary about it.

He tried to grin at them. They didn't know about it. He remembered all the times the pain of his ankle had been in his head. Now there was no doubt where it was. He wondered if he had broken it. It didn't matter if he he had. He couldn't walk off the field to Marion Cody, limping. He'd play if the bone came through.

The Eagles came back and kneeled on the ground around him, watching him. He could hear the brittle voices of Jumping Joe Harmon, Swede Larsen and the rest as they gave it to him from across the line.

"The iron man's called for time out. His ankle can't take it no longer, Mamma."

"That Benedict Arnold ain't no iron man."

He grinned wearily at the look of concern on the faces surrounding him.

"What a sense of humor," he said. The faces looked relieved.

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The Spartans had been riding him since they'd got over their first angry surprise at his appearance. They'd been going after his ankle too.

Now he felt the stimulation the men around him imparted. He'd felt it since that beginning kickoff when the ball went to Sonny and Sonny had flipped it backward to him. At the Eagle forty-five he had dropped all his interferers except Sonny and he dropped Sonny ten yards in Spartan territory. He was breaking loose on a kickoff and the crowd rose and emitted a mighty howling crescendo.

Jumping Joe and Cal Gillette drove him out of bounds with simultaneous flying tackles on the Spartan thirty-six.

"Look who it is!" Jumping Joe yelled.

He could hear the surprised babble running along the Spartan forward wall as it lined up. Every Gold player expected Tip to carry on the next play.

It seemed as if the entire Spartan line leaped on him as the ball was snapped. And O'Brien tossed a beauty to Don Looney that went to the Gold seven.

On the next play Tip carried behind Sonny and Smukler. It was an old Atlantic favorite, skirting right end on a power play. Swede Larsen nailed him on the one-yard line and the stands were suddenly in a frenzy of pleading sound.

On the next play Swede Larsen and Jumping Joe catapulted through the line, hit him high and low, the Swede giving his ankle a mighty wrench and Jumping Joe grinding at it with his cleats. The pain was bright and blinding. The ball squirted from his hands. It was recovered by Sandy Sanders on the four.

Jumping Joe grinned as he got to his feet.

"Listen, Father Time, you didn't have any idea of knocking your pals out of the playoff, did you?"

But it didn't matter about Jumping Joe. What was important was that Swede Larsen booted the Spartans out of trouble and Tip didn't want to look at the faces huddling around him for the next play.

"Forget it," Moose Harper boomed. "Wasn't your fault. You're everything Tad said you were, guy. Let's knock at their door again."

"B-13," Davey O'Brien said. "Tip, take it through center and roll over Mr. Jumping Joe."

For the duration of the third quarter the Eagles waged a battle that drew the reluctant admiration of the stands. Sonny's tackling and blocking bordered upon the ferocious. And three times the Eagles shook Tip loose and he got away for runs that carried the ball out of deep Philly territory.

He no longer felt the frozen hardness of the turf when he hit it. He was rolling. The men in the huddle presented their confidence, undiluted, to him. He was sweating and there was a warmth in his body and he was rolling. He couldn't understand about his ankle.

"Don't tell me," Moose Harper chortled, "we're going to beat this club!"

Everyone looked at him and there was a wonder in their glances. Then their eyes instinctively swung to Tip.

THE time out was over. They got up. Tip still couldn't believe it about his ankle. Larsen and Jumping Joe had given it wrenches that should have broken it off; and now, besides a dull soreness, it didn't even hurt.

And then he knew the answer. In the old days, before he had begun blaming any unexpected reverses upon an injury evidently beyond his control, he had absorbed and shaken off bodily shocks as bruising as this one because he had a thing to do and there was no time or reason to devote to nursing his reputation along. It was that way now.

They were on their own thirty. There were six minutes left, enough time to ice the very respectable score of 7 to 3 if they played sensibly.

Tip said, "We can take this bunch. Throw one, Davey."

O'Brien looked at him and then grinned. He threw one. It was high and arching and Don Looney caught it and ran with it to the Spartan thirty, where Cal Gillette dove at him in a vicious tackle that lifted him off his feet. When he came down the ball bobbled from his hands and Stoker Marchant recovered for the Spartans. It was a break and it was tough.

Sonny roved behind the defensive wall of the Eagles, slapping their raised rumps and exhorting them to take away the ball.

Suddenly the Gold began to roll.

Because of Tip's and Sonny's presence on the opposing club they had abandoned calling their plays from formation. They came up to the line and moved on Gillete's "Hike!"—which was unfamiliar and broke up their timing. It had handicapped them until they could accustom themselves to it.

Here, with three quarters of the final quarter elapsed, they began to click.

THE crowd yelled incessantly. Its enthusiasm for the underdog had changed into impatience for its own club to begin displaying its superiority. The regulars had been forced to remain in the game too long. They needed the rest with those Bears coming up next week.

Majestically and impressively the Gold went about the business of furnishing the proof that they were entitled to meet the Bears for the championship.

Their sheer power drove them through the tiring Eagle line. Hollbrook and Talbot were to be found at the bottom of each heap; but the heap was inevitably farther along the field than the last line of scrimmage.

The Spartans had grins for the club they were slapping down. There was no need for haste. In seven plays they had first down on the Eagle eighteen. It was easy as that.

Then Larsen cracked through guard for seven and Tip came up with Sonny Talbot to bring him down. He came over center, fought through to the secondary, was spilled by Tip and crawled until Talbot and Smukler ground him into the turf on the four.

They came out of their next huddle wearing broad grins and remarking audibly on the caliber of their opposition. A few seconds over a full minute remained. There was no hurry.

Cal Gillete called the signals, leisurely looking over the Eagle line, pausing to observe at large, "You boys might as well know we're coming through center."

He resumed his signals and they did come through center. They got a yard and a half.

On the next play Swede Larsen interrupted to call loudly, "Check! Listen, Cal, I didn't hear you right. You mean I'm to go off right tackle?" His face was innocently baffled.

"That's the idea." Gillette grinned.

Larsen went off right tackle. He got another yard and a half.

The Eagles were quiet, digging in, keeping their faces expressionless. There wasn't much you could do in the face of this power. There remained half a minute to go and the ball was on the one.

"Who wants to take it over?" Gillette inquired merrily of his players. They were not bothering with the huddle. "You take it, Joe. You show Mr. Seller-outer Hollbrook how we miss him. You take it around left end."

JUMPING JOE took it around left end. An Eagle back came up from the close secondary, left his feet and

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hurled into the interference with cleats spinning. It was Sonny Talbot, and his length-of-body block brought down three of the interferers. Sonny knew how to throw one.

Tip, following in his wake, caught Jumping Joe on the two. He didn't leave his feet. He appeared to bend down and gather Harmon's churning legs to his chest, hoist him bodily and carry him backwards for two yards before he dumped him in a body slam to the ground.

The air rushed out of Jumping Joe's mouth with a throaty *whoosh,* and the ball bobbled from his arms and Moose Harper dived at it, curling his big shoulders and hips around it.

The silence of the tiers hung over the field like a live thing.

Harmon got up stiffly, his eyes snapping.

"You not only sold out yourself; you sold out our signals, didn't you?"

"I thought you were broadcasting for the State of New York to hear, Joe." Tip walked away from him.

Clemmons righted the ball on the four and said briskly, "First and ten, Eagles."

The field judge held his gun above his head and looked at his watch. In the huddle Davey O'Brien said to Smukler, "Kick a long one, Dave."

They had done a fine job and each could feel the other's approval in the arms that were dropped briefly about shoulders as they bent in the huddle.

Tip said suddenly, "Davey, run K-77."

They looked at him, startled.

Sonny said, "Holy Ike," quietly and then said again, *"Holee-ee Ike!"* fervently.

The faces in the huddle were blank. K-77 was treacherous on your own forty. You didn't think about it on your four.

Then they were grinning at him. Their faces looked tired and dirty and respectful. He swallowed. The faces in the Atlantic huddles had looked like these at times like this. But those were the golden years, a long time past, and his word had been law because he was great.

Suddenly Davey O'Brien said, "K-77, gentlemen. Run it, Tip."

Sonny Talbot's face was red and alive and seemed to glisten. "He'll run it," he said softly.

They lined up in close formation. Cal Gillette, playing safety and expecting a kick, was not fooled. He came cautiously in half way.

"Watch a pass!" The cry went up along the Spartan line and in the Spartan secondary.

For a moment Tip felt the coldness of the turf as his fingers touched it. Then he knew that the ball was snapped and that he was moving slowly to his right; that players were moving back and forth in front of him in the intricate pattern of K-77; and then Smukler had planted the ball in his stomach and he was sweeping wide around right end.

It was as if he were running through water and the water was soft and warm. He laughed out loud. He hadn't thought of himself as being able to outrun his interference in three years!

"Let's go, Tip!"

SONNY Talbot had picked him up again and they were running in their old way and the roar from the sidelines was from young ghosts of men and women who were no longer doctors and clerks and vice-presidents, and stenographers and housewives and fashion experts; but were Most Likely to Succeed, Most Popular, Done Most for the Class, Most Beautiful, Most Handsome, Most Pestiferous . . . and they yelled and screamed and shrieked and pleaded, and there'd be no classes Monday and lots of them had arranged to charter a special train to Pasadena. . . A long one for Hollbrook. . .

Out of the past drifted figures that didn't fit and he suddenly saw that these figures were Jumping Joe Harmon and Swede Larsen, and farther back, stocky Cal Gillette; and it was the present and it called for a clear head and he slowed his pace ever so slightly.

He was aware that Moose Harper, Don Looney and Dave Smukler had long since chopped down Spartan tacklers and no longer ran before him.

There was only Sonny along. But that was fine. That was as it should be.

Larsen was coming at him diagonally from across the field, his face scowling, his chest pumping out his breath quickly. There was power and heft and speed in his heavy running.

Sonny sang out, "Take it along, Tip," and Larsen was cut down and Sonny was dropped behind but he had not left his feet.

Then Jumping Joe edged closer, trying to gauge his pace and play him toward the sideline. He seemed to drift very quickly toward Tip, his face thoughtful and deliberate and concerned. Tip let his stiff-arm come up.

He felt Harmon's hands slap at the silk of his legs, felt the fingers slip down and grab at his ankles and heard the impact of the body hitting the ground as he feinted—and spurted ahead.

Now there was Cal Gillette, and Cal was the Spartan safety because he never permitted a man to slip by him unless he was unconscious or buried beneath a mass of interferers or on the bench out of the game.

There was no one behind Gillette. He could see that. He also saw that Gillette had him where he wanted him —a yard from the sideline—and was converging with precision.

From somewhere he heard Sonny Talbot's low, "I'll take him, Tip. Slow down." and he knew Sonny had followed all the way and his help was here for the taking.

But you couldn't slow down when you'd spent your life building toward this run. You couldn't cut it off like you'd take your foot from an accelerator.

He couldn't slow down in time.

It would have been a fine run, he thought. And Tad Cody would have been pleased; and the girl . . . It was a pity.

If he could jump over Gillette, if he could fly over him, if he could somehow make it. . . .

He didn't make it.

Gillette hit him cleanly and with a driving strength that sent him to his knees ten yards from the last stripe.

Gillette's arms slipped down from his thighs to his shins and he rolled a little, lifting himself with a twisting effort, snapping one arm up quickly and calling, "Take it, Sonny!"

He flipped the ball laterally to Sonny and watched him go the rest of the way, thinking: *It's the first one he ever scored.*

CHAPTER XI

A DIRTY OLD JERSEY

FOR A long time in the locker room he lay on the dressing table, his face to the aromatic planks, listening to the delirium swirl above his head while the Philly trainer massaged his tired muscles. He kept thinking of how they'd carried him from the field. It had been a good many years since he'd been carried from a field on anybody's shoulders.

Bill Cody limped in, made his way through the congestion and stood over Tip. He didn't say anything. He put out his hand and touched the bare shoulder. His face was fiercely proud. He nodded, smiling. It was as if he had

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come just to look. Then he hobbled away, not speaking.

There was a great deal of horseplay and laughter, and photographers were letting off their flash-guns indiscriminately.

A voice above Tip said, "You'd think this outfit won the championship."

He twisted his head and looked up. Andy McKinney's face was hard and dour as he shook hands with Tad Cody.

"Congratulations, Tad. But I don't really mean 'em. I'm not thanking you for handing the playoff to those Redskins." He looked down and glowered at Tip. "Who'd have believed it? You old warhorse—holding out on me."

Tip's grin was tired. "I'm no younger than I was with the Spartans."

Lance Ellenger came up, his face set in a good-natured congratulatory smile. He shook hands with Tip.

"Beautiful," he said. "Beautiful. If we had to be licked I'm glad it could be you who did it."

"Thanks."

He thought: The perfect sport, gallant in defeat. He swung his legs from the table and sat up.

Ellenger said, "I know when I've pulled a boner and I'll admit it. Whatever the Phillies are offering you for next year I'll raise it a thousand."

"To manage a night club?"

Ellenger's smile accepted the chiding.

"That's fine," Tad Cody said. "We're getting him for seven."

Ellenger's eyebrows went up. He grinned to conceal his surprise. "It still goes. I'll give him eight."

Tad Cody's blue eyes were amused.

"I'll tell my owners you're interested and bidding." He grinned at Tip. "That should up your ante with them. I'd better see them now while they're in the mood to offer you the statue of William Penn." He went away, still grinning.

Ellenger shrugged graciously.

"No hard feelings, Tip?"

Tip sensed more meaning behind the words than the tone had sounded. But it wasn't the time to talk of Lynn. It would never be the time to talk of Lynn.

"Why should there be?" he said.

Sonny Talbot, grinning from ear to ear, came up.

"You going to sit here all night or you going to take a shower?" His voice was tenderly rough.

Ellenger said, "Good luck," smiled, and went away.

WHEN he'd showered and got into his coat Tad Cody came up. He was still grinning, as if his grin had been uninterrupted since he'd been gone. He flourished a pen and an elongated legal looking document.

"Sign your contract. I got you for nine, thanks to Ellenger. They might have gone higher, the way they feel now. But they'd kick this summer. It didn't hurt to leave well enough absolutely alone."

Tip signed. Tad Cody's face sobered.

"But I can only wangle a small advance. Enough for you to manage through the spring and summer. Not enough to pay what you owe. Not nearly enough."

Tip nodded. "They won't take me at McDowell School until I do. I can wait a year. A year won't make any difference."

"They won't hold the job open a year and you know it."

"There are other jobs. I'd have to request a leave of absence next fall anyway."

"I won't press you for the money, Mr. Hollbrook," someone said. "You are a very big fellow and I trust you."

He looked around into a pair of huge eyes sparkling behind very thick lenses. Louie Chamblis nodded to him.

"A fine game tonight. Mr. Hollbrook. I don't know myself, although I watched it. But they tell me you were excellent. I could have told them that before the game. My instincts inform me about a man." He twinkled at Tad Cody and then said gravely, "He is a very good charwoman too."

He turned back to Tip. "I am buying the Aster House myself."

"I'm glad to hear it, Louie."

"I am now many people's creditor. I am now your creditor. You owe no one but me and I am of the opinion that you are a sound investment. I believed your debts were a part of your unhappiness, Mr. Tip Hollbrook. That is why I attended to them. I have a short nose but I poke it into other people's business."

Tip couldn't think of anything to say. He gripped Louie Chamblis' fat little hand. Louie said:

"But that was only one part of your discontent. The other part you will have to attend to for yourself."

SHE drove quietly through the coldness of the night air. He watched her profile, faintly etched against the dashboard light. She had asked him how he felt and he had told her about his contract and his arrangement with Louie Chamblis and had said everything was fine. She had kept silent for a long while.

Now she said quietly, "No. Not everything."

Then he told her about Lynn's picture in the paper and why it was in the paper.

"So everything is fine," he concluded.

Sitting beside her, feeling the presence of her although there was a space on the seat between them, he experienced a sudden expansion inside his chest, as if a hand which for a long time had been contracted over his heart had released its grip.

He slid his body closer to hers. She didn't look at him. Her eyes were fixed ahead. But her breath came quickly between her parted lips. He linked his arm through hers.

"How would you like a crack at that McDowell School?" He grinned contentedly, squeezing her arm.

"Careful; I'm driving." She would not look at him.

"How would you?"

"I don't know. I've never lived on a farm."

"It isn't exactly like a farm. It's sort of—"

"A boy's school. I think it would be hateful."

He felt himself flush. He didn't answer. He looked away.

"Oh, Tip, you really do want me, don't you!"

She had risked a quick glance at him. Her eyes were wide and eager.

"Stop the car," he said.

She pulled up by the curb. He put his arms around her.

She said breathlessly, "Playing second fiddle to a school of boys would be better than looking through a glass at a dirty old jersey."

"I hear they give sabbatical years there. Just blink and it'll be seven years and we can take a good look at that Baghdad."

She didn't answer. Her lips were still parted.

He kissed her. He hadn't realized how long he had been waiting for this. He gave it everything he had. He took his time.

After a while she pulled away.

"We'd better go."

She was smiling. But she was still breathless

"Yes, we'd better," he said.

There wasn't any sense that he could see in sitting out here in the cold.

THE END

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River Man

Davey wanted to spring after the mate, but Tom Stinger held him back. "Easy, pup," he said

Snags and derelicts wait under the surface of the Big Muddy, and rebel guns line the banks. It's Hell and low water for the packet Sherrod—and with a pilot the whole river calls yellow. Which opinion is in for a little revising

By Frank Bonham

DAVEY LEATHERS turned from the glowing furnace door, ash-hoe in his hands, as Sid Logan, first mate aboard the Missouri River packet *Sherrod,* came down off the boiler deck. Logan was a heavy-shouldered, bull-necked man with a hard, square jaw and angry black eyes.

He stared at Davey, the flames reddening his blunt features. Then his glance snapped to big, grizzled Tom Stinger, chief engineer.

"Are you deaf, Stinger?" he barked. "Ain't you heard the pilot ringing for steam the last half hour?"

Davey watched Tom Stinger with a bright gleam in his eyes. Old Tom left off tinkering with the "doctor," the steam pump that kept his boilers full, and faced Logan. He was four inches over six feet and built like a bull buffalo. His seamy face, with its stand of gray whiskers that never seemed to get more than a quarter of an inch long, was full of derision.

"That brass-pounder's been hangin' on the bell ever since we left Fort Benton," he drawled. "If you'll notice, the clapper o' the bell is now tied down permanent. If Mr. Murdo don't like the way I build my fires, he can climb down and build his own."

Sid Logan's jowls purpled as he glared at the Irishman. But he only grunted and walked past him to where Davey stood. He yanked the hoe from his grasp and grubbed around in the red coals; then he shoved the handle back at the eighteen-year-old engineer's cub.

"If you'd keep the ashes down," Logan said, "you'd keep your b'ilers hot. Clean that box out, now, and heave a rick o' wood into 'er."

Davey gave him a stolid stare. "Forty mile to the next wood station, and us short," he said. "Guerrillas burnt all the wood back at Wolf Point. Plumb bad if we run out and have to drift—"

"Maybe," Logan scowled, "you'd like to come up and show the pilot how to run his boat."

He stalked off, but at the runway turned back. Davey watched his face, noting the sweat that crawled down from his thick, curly black hair. Sid Logan had been more overbearing than ever since they had left Fort Benton two days ago. But, oddly, there was a look of terror on him now.

In a low, husky tone he said: "Maybe you've forgot what kind of a cargo we're freightin'. There's a half-million in gold in the captain's safe! Don't think Jeff Davis' guerrillas are going to let us lay on this river all summer.

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They boarded the *Miss Hannah* last month while she was takin' on wood. Shot down the crew and the free niggers she was takin' to the Dakotas."

Logan's eyes flinched as they roamed along the near bank, questing among the matted wild rose bushes and willows. "Maybeso them bushes is crawlin' with guerillas right now!" he breathed. "Hopin' to put a ball through the pilot's head and wreck the ship. Them soldiers we're carryin' won't help us none, then. We're freightin' something the Union needs more'n niggers. Gold to buy guns with! Gold to pay soldiers with! Do you savvy, Stinger, we've got to have steam to get through!"

Stinger said harshly, his eyes fuming under shaggy gray brows: "It'll take more'n a groanin' steam drum to get this tub to Council Bluffs. You can tell Murdo that for me. Tell 'im he'll get his steam, if he savvies to use it."

Sid Logan's back stiffened, his mouth twitching. "One of these fine days," he said slowly, "you're going to find you ain't even fit to rake ashes on a first-class steamboat. Hang this up where you'll remember it: there's no place for a coward on the Big Muddy. Some time that yellow streak of yours is going to crop out again. And when it does—you're done!"

DAVEY LEATHERS would have sprung after him, but for the paw that clamped on his shoulder. "Easy, pup," Tom Stinger said.

The boy stood trembling under his grasp, his eyes blazing. Davey was almost as tall as the mate, but it was a ragged, spindle-shanked five foot ten that was his. He would never be heavy. He was of lean, slab-sided make, his body hard as boiler-plate. His features were thin, eyes dark with an everpresent hankering. His scrubby blond hair hadn't been cut in four months.

"Damn him!" he choked. "Damn' four-flushin' wharf scum. Raisin' his voice to the best pilot that ever swung a wheel from here to N'Orleans!"

"That was yesterday," Tom Stinger said gently. "Some day, pup, we'll show 'em again. We're on, now. Git to your in-jine."

Muttering, the boy went off through the hodge-podge of reeking black machinery to relieve the second engineer's striker at the larboard engine. Tom would be taking over starboard. The very notion of it—Tom Stinger, standing like a run-of-the-mine engineer among his cams and gauges—was gall. *Mister* Tom Stinger, whose name had once been breathed with those of Horace Bixby and Sam Clemens when rivermen talked of lightning pilots! The same Tom Stinger who had taken the *A. L. Shotwell* from New Orleans to Cairo for a standing record.

Davey nourished the conviction that some day Tom would again stand with his great varnished wheel before him. As he had stood those first two years Davey knew him, when he was his cub. But he was coming to know more thoroughly the contempt in which rivermen held those who lost their nerve. Tom Stinger had left his reputation and his courage in the old *Lizzie Barton,* when she blew a steam drum in Bayou Lafitte.

Ancient boiler-plate was the culprit. Other pilots, jealous of him, bandied it about that he had been crowding on too much steam to beat another ship. Thirty passengers had been scalded to death or drowned in the disaster. The story was started that Tom Stinger had lost his nerve after the tragedy. That he sweated buckets every hitch. That he was done. And that was all that was needed, on the river, to finish a man.

Tom and Davey Leathers ended up, one day, in the engineroom of a packet plying between St. Louis and Fort Benton, on the Big Muddy. But always, old Tom's heart was up in the wheelhouse, with the clean breeze against his face and the spokes under his hands.

THE hours of Davey's hitch went slowly. It was dusk when the second engineer's cub came to relieve him. Davey found Tom Stinger in the engineroom. Murdo, who had just come off duty, was with him.

Murdo was a long drink of a man with a sour face and a drawling affectation of speech. Like many top-notch wheelmen, he dressed fit to kill. His boots were high-heeled and shiny, with tassels, and his britches fitted like wet chamois. He greased his hair until it glistened, and twisted his mustache ends into sword points.

Murdo inspected the weights Tom had hung on the escape valve arm for extra steam. Then, with his soft fingers, he gestured at the furnace. "Are you trying to freeze something in there?" he demanded. "There isn't enough steam in this tub to operate a tin whistle. What's the matter with your resin?"

Said Tom Stinger: "Not a thing. I'm savin' that resin for whenever we need some damn' hot fires in a hurry. You ain't forgot Tobacco Island?"

Murdo's lazy eyes opened a little wider, as if he hadn't thought as far ahead as Tobacco Island. Then he shrugged. "I thought someone would have the good sense to bring along an adequate supply of fuel—"

Tom winked at Davey as the pilot stalked to the forecastle stairs. "He knows damn' well we got the last two bar'ls o' resin in Fort Benton!"

THEY went forward and stood among barrels and boxes at the bow. The water, whitish in the deepening dusk, stretched ahead of them as still as a pond. At moments like this, between sleep and the long hours in the engineroom, Tom Stinger seemed almost happy. He would fill Davey with the lore of the riverman, set his brain afire with the thrill of piloting a ship. He would test his memory of the things he had told him time and again.

"Yonder whirlpool." He pointed with the chewed stem of his corn-cob pipe. "What do you make of it?"

Davey went tense with scanning the almost invisible swirl of currents. "Reef bein' washed away. She'll be like to form forty-fifty foot lower down."

"Cuss you, pup!" Tom roared. "That spot's goin' to be too shoal to pass next trip! That's the mark o' shoalin' water. Learn that! Or someday you'll pile your ship so high an' dry ladders can't reach 'er! Yonder streak, now—?"

Davey bit his lip, his gaze beating into the dark. There was a hurting in his throat. Tom's rebuke was a fearful thing, for him. In the daytime he would have answered before the question was fully put. But a pilot must know his river four ways: upstream, downstream; night and day.

"That there's a—a snag."

Tom Stinger gave out with a boatman's curse, lurid and stinging. "Wind reef!" he barked. "If you skirt every one o' them, you'll pilot the slowest tub on the Big Muddy!"

Then his snapping blue eyes softened, and he nudged the miserable cub. "Tell you something, pup. Mr. Murdo's cub, up yonder in the pilot house, is makin' the same mistakes. This ole river's lower'n I've ever seed 'er. He's been a-dodgin' the marks the wind makes, and runnin' full onto sawyers. Murdo ain't a passel better. He's a-countin' on higher water after we pass the Yellowstone. But mark you, she'll be worse!"

. . . And the next morning, when they passed the mouth of the Yellowstone and saw the muddy trickle crawling from it, old Tom's prediction was borne out. Murdo went up to the wheelhouse with a deep furrow between his eyes. It was four hours later, when Tom and Davey were taking their off-hitch up on the hurricane deck before the pilothouse, that Murdo's lanky, freckled cub, Peters, came and made talk with them.

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"That ol' Muddy's shore low," he offered. "I reckon nobody ever took a ship through shoaler water'n this."

"She ain't been took through, yet." Tom Stinger continued to smoke and read the face of the river. There was a quiet broken by the voices of soldiers on the boiler deck; by the jingle of bells in the heart of the ship; by the muted threshing of the paddles.

A turn in the river suddenly threw them square upon the wreck of the old *Sioux City*. For ten years the splintered hulk had lain there for pilots to take warning by, or to pile into in the night.

Stinger frowned. Last trip there had been ample water to each side of her. But now it was a question which channel to try.

On the larboard, the *Sherrod* would crowd the willow and chokecherry tangle of the mainland bank. Guerilla guns might lurk in those thickets. To starboard, there were shoals and a snag.

Peters' voice came heavy with exaggerated nonchalance. "Mr. Murdo reckoned he'd take her through to larboard. What you think, now?"

Stinger spat overside, winked at Davey. "You tell Mr. Murdo, if he wants my advice he can come and ask for it personal."

Peters jumped back. His freckled face twisted. "Mr. Murdo don't need the advice of a has-been pilot no time! I reckon he c'd give you plenty—about keepin' your steam drum in one piece!"

Above them, Murdo's voice roared for Peters. Down below, bells were jangling as he rang for half speed larboard and full speed starboard. The *Sherrod* began to warp closer to the wreck, making for the channel between it and the mainland. Peters ran for the pilothouse. Davey's fury-filled eyes followed him.

Lines folded into the skin about Stinger's eyes. His lips tautened. "Look you, pup!" he said, his voice husky. "Mark that wake to sta'board o' the *Sioux City*. That's a planter. Said Stump is a scant quarter-one under the surface. We could clear her, but not the shoals. She'll draw one-less-quarter in the channel, judgin' by the marks on the bank."

"Too shoal!" Davey grunted.

"Not if a man savvies his boat. I'd bear down full steam, ring for full steam astern just as she took the bar. That throws her high in the front and she clears her bow. Then full speed ag'in, and over we go, with a scrapin' and a groanin' like you never heard. But we're over."

"Mr. Murdo," Davey pointed out breathlessly, "don't see it that way. He's takin' us through on the other side."

"Pray the Lord there ain't guerrillas on the bank," the engineer said. "Hunker down by the chimney, whilst we go through."

THE *Sherrod,* her gleaming white Texas and tall iron chimneys towering above the matted brush of the bosque, nosed into the narrow channel formed by derelict and bank. Old Tom Stinger hunkered in a half crouch, deep-set eyes studying the river. To larboard, overhanging branches almost brushed the gingerbread railings of boiler and main decks. The *Sioux City,* stark and faded, loomed at the other side to rake the packet should she drift too close.

Bells clamored in the bowels of the ship. The decks were lined with soldiers with muskets at the ready. With apprehension tingling up and down his spine, Davey Leathers tried to keep his mind on the things the pilot would be noticing.

Then his thoughts exploded, as from the bank a salvo of shots poured into the wheelhouse.

Broken glass rained down on them where they squatted. There was a sharp cry from Murdo; and a body struck the floor. Again the leaves of the willows stirred. Balled lead hammered into the pilothouse. A moment later the *Sherrod* rammed heavily against the bank.

Lead and flame lashed back across the narrow strip of water, as the soldiers fired blindly into the ambuscade of the guerillas. Davey's heart was a cold, sharp chunk of iron. He lay on his belly, fingers digging at the planks, flesh crawling as he awaited a bullet. Tom Stinger's hand gripped his shoulder.

Now the wheelhouse door flew open and Captain Gallatin stood in the aperture. It was an astounding thing the slight, red-faced man called down.

"Stinger! Stinger, get up here! Murdo and Peters are both down! I can't run this thing!"

Now! Davey thought. Now they'll savvy whether Tom Stinger is a coward. The thought was hardly formed when Tom's hand was dragging him to his feet and he was being hauled to the ladder.

"Up you go, pup!" Tom commanded. Davey scuttled up the ladder like a monkey. A bullet tore into a rung, cutting his hand with splinters. Then he was inside the pilothouse.

Murdo lay before the wheel, a bullet through his head. Peters, his breast torn with a dozen balls, was huddled near him, gasping out his life in strangling breaths. Slivers of glass sprinkled the carpet. The varnished walls were torn with bullets. One of the wheel-spokes was shot away and a ragged stump remained.

Sid Logan stood beside Captain Gallatin. Logan's dry tongue kept fumbling over his lips. For once there was no sarcasm on his face.

"Get us off that bank!" he roared. "Another minute and they'll board us."

"They ain't enough to board us," said Stinger. "But they'll dam' soon have us afire."

Captain and mate whirled to look aft. Davey's glance went with theirs. He saw the blazing raft the guerrillas had shoved into the channel. It was perhaps a hundred yards astern and bearing down so that it would come to rest under their landing stages.

IN TOM STINGER'S eyes there was a hard, eager shine. He stood with both gnarled hands on the wheel, his gaze whipping downward through the shattered windows. There was nothing cowardly about the way he stood up under the threat of those hidden guns. Now he yanked a bell cord.

Seconds later the big paddles began to thresh the water. The *Sherrod* grated off the bank. Stinger wheeled her so that her paddles would strike the raft before the landing stages could be set afire. They were back in mid-channel when, from the momentarily silent bosque, a single rifle roared.

At the pilot's side a hanging lamp shivered into a million diamonds. Coal oil burst into flame, ignited by a spark from the impact of the ball with the bracket. Tom Stinger staggered back.

He sank to his knees, pawing his face. Burning oil ran blue and yellow over his head and shoulders. With a cry Davey was on him, beating out the flames with a curtain he yanked from a window. Tom did not get up immediately when the fire was out. Logan and Captain Gallatin were stamping out the flames that licked over the rug. But the eyes Tom lifted to Davey were dull.

"Take the wheel, pup! I—I ain't seein' no good."

Tom—!"

"*Take the wheel!*" Tom Stinger roared.

Davey bounded to the wheel. Straddling Murdo's body, he clutched the spokes. His heart thumped like a fist against his ribs. All the lessons he had had from Tom were in his mind at once. Biting his lip, he sorted through

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them. The *Sherrod* was on the point of backing into the derelict, now. He rang full speed ahead and waited with hands sweaty on the spokes.

A tremor ran through the packet. Slowly she stopped, and, as her wheels reversed, slipped ahead. The raft was deluged by a cataract of tawny water.

Davey kept his attention riveted on the path of water before him. He closed his mind to the bullets that hammered into the flimsy wall, that rang off the iron chimneys like anvil strokes. The packet handled clumsily under his untaught hands. A score of things must be kept in mind: the ripples and wakes on the river, the wheel, the drift, the proper signals.

Pain made Tom Stinger's voice raspy. "How's she lay?"

"Abreast o' the *Sioux City*. Clear water ahead."

"Then swing 'er! Put the Texas twixt us and them devils."

Davey felt the big ship turning under his feet. With the officers' cabin to shield them from the snipers, the attack from shore ceased. The *Sherrod* steamed on, with a blind man and a raw hand for pilots.

THROUGH that endless afternoon, with the sun burning ing his cheek, Davey tooled the packet. Captain Gallatin bathed and treated Tom's eyes. Tom vowed it was like looking through a Louisiana fog with the plantations burning cane on the windward bank. With difficulty, he could make out the prow.

Nervousness rode Davey Leathers heavily. His eyes ached with ceaseless searching of the brown strip of water. Without Tom Stinger at his elbow they would have been wrecked before sundown. From the shore marks Davey described, Tom was able to tell him where lurked hidden snags and rocks. Once, when the distant barking of a dog came to their ears, Tom himself piled onto the wheel.

"Sand bar dead ahead! Watch for 'er! That hound allus welcomes us."

And a moment later the *Sherrod* scraped by a reef the water had failed to tell of. It was such a memory as Tom's that made a pilot.

As night pulled a black curtain across the river, Davey felt as if the ship were steaming into a weird half-world. The Missouri lay a milky path beneath him. Everything was changed. No longer could he reckon the depth of the river by water-marks on the banks. Wind-reef and true reef were indistinguishable. It was at such times that the lightning pilot thumbed the pages of his incredible memory for aid.

But when midnight brought them to Disaster Bend, even Tom Stinger shied. "Shoalest stretch of water on the Big Muddy," he told the cub. "Put a leadsman on the bow."

With a deck hand perched on the bow, slinging his lead, they pushed gingerly into the bend. The leadsman's cries were an eerie sound in the dark.

"Half twain! Half twain! Quarter-less-twain! *Mark one!*"

Davey rang for reverse engines, his heart pounding. Down below, on the hurricane deck, a small winking light had been distracting him for minutes. Now, for the first time, he was conscious of what it was.

"Cigar on the hurricane," he told Tom. "Looks like Sid Logan. Wait a minute—Tom!" He held his voice down to a harsh whisper. "I'll eat that cigar if he ain't signalin' with it."

"You're wool-gatherin'," Stinger told him. Groping his way to the window, he shouted at the smoker. "Douse that cigar, dang you!"

The cigar was hastily flung into the water. A few minutes later, the *Sherrod* successfully passed the shoals. But Davey Leathers was not sure that he had been wool-gathering, nor that Tom thought he had been.

DAWN found him bleary-eyed, mentally and physically burned out. His lean face had picked up a fine webbing of wrinkles about the mouth and eyes. Pounds had evaporated from his spare frame. Not for a minute during the night had he let his attention wander. But daylight brought a tendency to let down.

Tom Stinger sensed that in the way Davey called off the landmarks. Suddenly his strong fingers were biting into the boy's shoulder.

"Lettin' up, eh? What kind of a lily-fingered weaklin' are you, that a little trick like you've done leaves you noddin'?"

"I've been on fourteen hours," Davey said defensively.

"Fourteen hours! I stood the wheel thirty-six durin' the flood of '44. Your time ain't come yet by a heap. Listen to me. You mind Tobacco Island? Remember how we skinned through on the way up? There'll be no such thing done this trip. We've got to go behind the island, where the water's deep."

"Tobacco Island!" The boy's eyes lost their dullness. "That's where they boarded the *Bayou Queen!* The red-legs are thick in there. It'll be like turnin' the boat over to 'em."

Tom sat down again, rubbing his sore eyes. "She's got to be done. Mind the wheel."

Davey's body was in a bath of cold sweat. What had happened at the *Sioux City* would be nothing compared to Tobacco Island. From both sides, red-legs could pour their lead into the ship. There were said to be hundreds of Confederate guerrillas in the vicinity: hard-riding, straight-shooting men who took for their badge leggings of red morocco leather.

Davey thought of logs anchored in the channel behind the island; of rocks dumped where they would tear the bottom out of the ship.

Somehow, word was passed that an attack was expected at Tobacco Island. The soldiers, who had been roughhousing on the lower decks, fell into silence. The low singing of Negro roustabouts was stilled. All eyes were for the river. All were watching for the brush-clad island, of horseshoe shape, that was set in a small backwater of the same form. For two hundred yards the *Sherrod* must pass between crowding, overgrown banks.

In the middle of the morning, when Davey Leathers thought he could no longer hold his heavy lids open, a low shape like a pall of smoke materialized far down the Muddy. He described it, thick-tongued, to Tom. Tom pulled himself to his feet.

"Tobacco Island," he muttered. "Gimme the tube. We'll use that resin, now."

STINGER held the speaking tube to his lips, bawling an order that echoed back to them from the engine room. The whole ship was waiting for that command. As blacker smoke began to spew from the chimneys, a heavier throb of engines to be felt, officers came to stand silently in the pilothouse. There was Captain Gallatin nervously clicking his false teeth, and Major Shell, in charge of the troops, smoothing his heavy yellow mustaches with a gloved finger.

The second mate and some other officers formed a tight knot, muttering monotoned comments. Sid Logan loomed at Davey's left hand, chewing his blunt cigar.

Tom Stinger knew, and Davey knew, that these men were very humble, now, who not so long ago had had scorn for an aging pilot who had turned yellow. For they had seen him in as black an hour as riverman had ever known, and had seen the metal of him shine bright and clean. They were humble—and a little scared. Even a brave man can know fear in the moment before death strikes.

Davey Leathers bit his lip and wished that feeling of butterflies in his stomach would cease. He was plumb

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From each side rebel lead slashed at them, threatening the life of everyone there in that wheelhouse

scared out of his wits, watching Tobacco Island resolve out of the haze into a low, tree-clad island. But he'd have died before he forsook his wheel.

He told Tom, breathlessly, what he read as the channel's mouth opened to swallow them. The fog in Tom Stinger's eyes was clearing a little now, making him all the more impatient that he couldn't see enough to handle the wheel, but beyond the bow of the ship all was gray mist and blurred shadows to his vision. He heard Davey out and grunted his recommendations.

The *Sherrod* crept nervously into the shady canal, with its irritating hordes of biting insects and its frilled banks. Safely into it, the water clear, Davey rang for full steam ahead.

He wanted to sink down, to hide under something. Of all the targets the ship offered, he was the one they would take first. Stuck up there in the front of that frail, bullet-riddled shack on the hurricane deck, he was like a squirrel on top of a log—a cinch shot.

Sid Logan walked to the rear of the cabin, and Davey's lips tightened. Logan knew a dangerous spot when he was in one.

They were halfway through the bayou-like corridor and nothing had happened. The racing stern-paddles made watery thunder. Rotting cottonwood leaves filled the cabin with a fetid stench. The screaming tension increased.

Then it exploded.

A swish of sound like that of a thrown rope was all the warning the *Sherrod* had. A moment later the ship came to a lurching, bulkhead-straining stop.

THEN it was as if both banks ran with fire. From each side rebel lead slashed at them. A roar of musketry shook the leaves of the cottonwoods. Half the men in the wheelhouse would have been killed in the initial barrage, but for the fact that the sudden stop had hurled them all to the floor. Davey alone remained upright, hanging terrified to his wheel.

A glance below and he gasped: "Red-legs! Boardin' us!"

The trees of the island were giving up their horde of red-legged guerrillas. Over the side they came, spilling onto the main deck. A wild nightmare band, shaggy, bewhiskered, clad in buckskins and tattered woolens, fearless and bloodthirsty as wolves. Men with nothing to lose, and plunder to win. By the dozen they were shot down and sprawled back into the strip of water they had jumped.

Gallatin was at the window, emptying his Navy pistol into the squirming horde. Tom Stinger bellowed into Davey's ear.

"What's a-matter? Why don't she move?"

"They've throwed a line over our mooring bitt. We're fast!"

Tom cursed. Davey yelled: "Shall I back her and try it again?"

"You'll only tear her guts out. That line's got to be cut. You, down there!" Tom leaned out of the window, unmindful of shots. "Cut that line!"

But in the bedlam no one heard him. The guerrillas on the mainland were trying to cover for the boarding party by sending salvo after salvo into the ship. The soldiers aboard were outnumbered three to one. Major Shell sprang down the ladder to join his men, Gallatin and the rest following him.

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Tom Stinger fumbled his old six-shooter from his belt. "Take it," he told Davey. "Shoot hell out of that line. Then full steam ahead and maybe we can bust 'er."

Davey whirled to the window. Bracing the barrel of the revolver over the sill, he squinted. A hard ring of coldness pressed against his spine, bunching his nerves into knots.

Sid Logan said: "When that 'un goes off, mister, so does this 'un. Drop it."

Davey turned, his brain struck numb. Too stunned to reason, he stood with the gun hanging from his fingers, staring into Sid Logan's tight, half-scared features.

Logan's gun arm stiffened. "Drop it!"

The ice melted from Davey's brain. Fury, and a vast contempt, twisted through him. "Still think I was wool-gatherin', Tom? This loud-mouthed river cull *was* signalin' with that cigar! It was him that passed the word we were comin'."

Logan's finger visibly tensed on the trigger. It was not patience that held the bullet, but a lack of courage to murder in cold blood. His lips stretched tight.

"If you don't drop that gun—"

Tom Stinger said hurriedly: "Drop it, Davey. He's gonna shoot."

Davey let the gun fall. At full cock, it went off when it struck, sending a ball between Davey and the mate, through the ceiling. The roar caused Sid Logan to start. And in the next instant big Tom Stinger was on him.

Stinger drove him against the wheel, his hairy fist smashing into Logan's face. Logan fought like a tiger, not making a sound, but his gun went off twice. The second shot took a tiny chunk out of Tom's ear.

Quickly, Davey bent and retrieved the smoking forty-five. Gripping the gun by the barrel, he came up fast behind Sid Logan. The gun chopped twice. Blood and hair came away on the butt-plates the second time.

With his foot, Tom Stinger rolled the traitor out of the way. "As I was sayin'," he growled, "a few shots might cut that hawser to where we could break it."

"Aye, aye, sir," Davey said.

He emptied both guns into the hawser, watching the heavy hempen line jump at each shot. But it still seemed as stout as ever when he reached for the bellpull and rang half speed astern.

A score of red-legs were dumped into the river as the *Sherrod* pulled away. Fifty feet above, Davey grabbed up the speaking tube.

"All you've got. Full steam ahead!"

The packet hit the end of the line with a shock that seemed to rip her apart. One of the glowing chimneys tore from its moorings and crashed into the river in a geyser of steam. The line held. Then Davey saw the mooring bitt tilt. It tore loose, taking out a piece of deck ten feet square as it was yanked out by the bolts.

Shuddering, the packet began to stir forward. Shouting red-legs sprang into the water, trying to reach the landing stages. Davey could feel each thud as the big paddles sucked them under and broke them like twigs. He was conscious of bullets singing about him.

But suddenly there was the wine of victory in his blood, intoxicating him. He could see daylight ahead. With a surge of bravado, he pulled the whistle cord and blasted a riverman's goodbye. They were clear.

For a mile, the boat shed red-legs like barnacles. Dog-eared, dilapidated, she rolled on down-river. Davey Leathers was moved to sing a keelboatman's song as they plowed on toward Council Bluffs.

AT MIDNIGHT, the packet boat *Sherrod* limped up to the dock at Council Bluffs. Fifteen dead men were carried off before the Union's gold was touched. Sid Logan was among them.

Up in the pilothouse, Captain Gallatin shook Tom Stinger's hand warmly. "I don't know who merits the credit, Stinger, you or the boy. The river's never seen a finer piece of piloting. There's a place for you two on this ship as long as you want it."

Tom Stinger's eyes sparkled. He winked at Davey. "Pilot this old tub? I guess not. Come, Davey, my lad. Yonder's Mr. Jory, pilot of the *Natchez*, come to swap windies with us. Doubtless tomorrow we'll do him the honor of shippin' as far as St. Louis with him in the wheelhouse. But first—a beer in the Frontier Bar."

A beer in the Frontier Bar—with Tom Stinger, while an admiring river crowd watched! Davey's walk took on a proud swagger as he and Tom went down to the landing stage. For Tom Stinger was a name to breathe respectfully on this man's river, and any cub of his was a man in his own right.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 10, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

IT'S our yearly custom to recognize Thanksgiving Day in these columns; and we have just realized, sitting here at the typewriter, that there is a very simple, obvious thing which needs to be said. It is this: We all of us should give thanks for the story-teller's art.

In a grave time like the present, when people everywhere are living under stress, you are likely to be told with some impatience that reading stories is futile and childish. It is a frivolity and a weakness, you may be told; it can be of no help in this critical hour. Everyone must face the tremendous facts.

Yes, everyone must face the facts. But it is especially important now for people to maintain their poise, and to do that they must sometimes relax. They must be able to find delight. That is what the story-teller has been giving to anyone who would listen since the beginning of mankind, and it is a rare and valuable offering. So we who will listen owe the story-teller a great debt of gratitude; we should give thanks that he still practices his art. . . .

SOME time ago a discussion of bullfighting got under way in this department, and now we have another contribution to it from

W. B. ENGLER

The comments of Marion Reese, in Nov. 1st issue of ARGOSY are interesting. My experience with Portuguese bullfights goes back some twenty years when I spent a year in Lisbon. Of course I often made my way out that amazingly wide Avenida da la Libertad to Campo Pequeno to attend the bullfight.

In every fight I saw the bull's horns were heavily padded and from conversations with Portuguese friends I gathered that that was the universal rule. The leading bullfighters of that day were, as I now remember it, the Casamiros. Frequently I saw the bull get to their mounts. Bare horns would have meant serious injury to a valuable horse. Also, in Portuguese bullfights the bull is *not* killed, merely harried until it no doubt wishes it were dead. Often, I noticed, charming *señoritas,* attending the bullfights, did not once direct their flashing eyes toward the arena. Ah, Marion, I wonder.

But the Spanish *corrida!* Yes, ma'am, plenty gory. I have seen a horse gored by the bull, with its entrails swinging from the gaping wound. Surprisingly the horse remained on its feet and was led from the arena to where an imperturbable peon stuffed the dangling viscera back inside and twisted a wad of grass into the hole to keep it there. The horse was brought back into the arena for the next bull. Not nice that, no, and not a sport to be enjoyed by an individual with a queasy stomach. The Spaniards naïvely explain that the horses are old, wornout nags, ready to die anyhow so that it really does not matter.

However, *señoras y señores,* before you start criticizing bear in mind that the bulls and horses do not suffer any more that a pheasant or rabbit, wounded by a hunter, and dying a slow, miserable death in the tall grass. At least the brutes in the arena are dispatched rather promptly.
Flagstaff, Ariz.

YOU may remember the young gentleman who wrote us to say that when he grew up he was going to be an author. Well, here is further word from him; and he examines ARGOSY so carefully that we have an uneasy feeling he may grow up to be an editor. Let him take warning before it is too late.

BENNY TARVER

I've matured to the ripe old age of fourteen since the last time I wrote you. ARGOSY has changed a lot, too. I like the idea of articles, but you stick too close to world events and war. Maybe a few on sports would break the monotony.

It gives me more time to read your book now that it comes out every other week. I get enough of the West without having to find it in every issue of ARGOSY. I think Dr. Kildare is good—what happened to him? There seem to be a lot of people who think that Max Brand can do better on other stories.

Now that your magazine comes out bi-weekly it should be larger to keep it from looking like a comic book. The front cover is very attractive with scenes like the one with Henry Fonda and that dog (which looks like my German shepherd, Sam). Having more than one picture to a story is better, but you have only two artists that I know of drawing for you. I think that everyone will agree that colored illustrations inside your book would boost sales ten percent.

If you introduce a *new* author every issue it would be like an orchestra that introduces new songs and Major Bowes who introduces new talent. It would give the little guy a chance.
Las Cruces, New Mexico.

NOW a note from another of W. C. Tuttle's innumerable admirers, who appear to be organizing their forces.

MRS. CARL WALLGREN

After reading the letter by Saul Winer I was delighted over his brilliant idea.

My first recollection of ARGOSY is as a small girl—the bright covers held a great fascination for me. When I married I introduced my husband to ARGOSY and now he too is a constant reader.

We have had a great many hearty laughs over the antics of Henry and his helpful (?) helpers. We would treasure a collection of stories about them.

Hoping a great many more of your readers feel as we do and will take time out to say so.
San Mateo, Calif.

THE card below is the kind of thing editors love to get. From

ELMSLEY LAMB

I'll continue to buy ARGOSY whatever its cover and regardless of day or issue. It's tops in my mind. Good luck.
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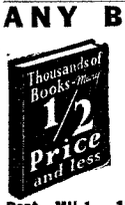

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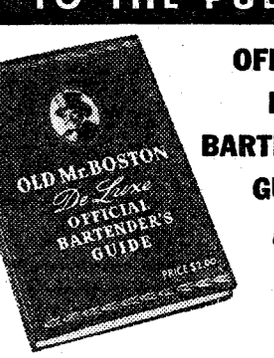

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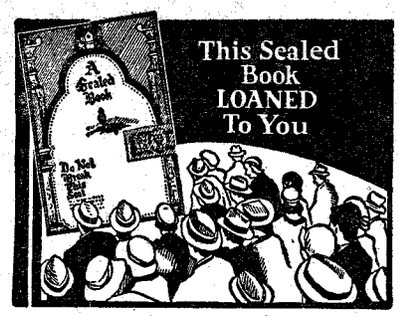

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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of ARGOSY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for Oct. 1, 1941.

State of NEW YORK } ss.:
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared THOMAS W. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Vice-President of The Frank A. Munsey Company, publisher of ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publisher—**The Frank A. Munsey Company,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—**George W. Post,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—**Albert J. Gibney,** 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—None.

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THOMAS W. DEWART, Vice-President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1941.

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